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WITH HARP AND CROWN.

WITH HARP AND CROWN.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHORS OF

"READY-MONEY MORTIBOY,"

"MY LITTLE GIRL," "THIS SON OF VULCAN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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WITH HARP AND CROWN.

CHAPTER I.

DR. CHACOMB went down to Devonshire, and arrived at Chacomb in time for dinner. He did not think it necessary to announce his intentions. The house looked quiet and even deserted; the gravel walks were half grown over with grass; the beds, which ought to have been gay with spring flowers, were bare; there was no one about the place; the front door, generally open, was shut. What could it mean? He walked to the back of the house, and entered by the stables.

In the hall there was no one; in the breakfast-room no one; in the dining-room, drawing-

room, and library no one. He thought of the Collection-room. Chauncey Chacomb was sitting there in a corner, his head half resting on the uneven shoulder, his face the image of despondency. He started to his feet, however, when he saw his cousin, and rushed to meet him in a kind of rapture.

"Joe!" he cried—"cousin Joe! Oh, Joe, why were you not here a fortnight ago?"

"Why did you not write to me? Come, Chauncey, this is not the way a bridegroom should look. Cheer up, man; pluck up spirit, and be happy."

He shook his head dolefully.

"Happy!" he groaned. "Happiness and I parted four years ago, when I did—you know what. If you'd come a fortnight ago, you might have prevented it."

"My dear Chauncey, you are not a child in leading-strings. Come, sit down, and tell me all about it. Where is she?"

"She's upstairs in her bed-room, with her maid. She's trying on all the dresses. There are hundreds of them lying in drawers, just as my lady left them. She's got them now, with

the jewellery, and she spends all her time pulling the things on and off again. She has sent away every one of the servants except the two grooms, because they were not civil, she says. And so here we are in this big house, we three —she, I, and the little maid, the only one she kept out of all the lot. And, Joe, I am afraid."

"Nonsense, Chauncey; what should you be afraid of?"

But the doctor did not like the look of things.

"I am afraid of being robbed. Look at my Collection, left by itself all night. Why, some one might break in and carry off the very gems of the whole. I want to leave it, too, to the National Museum just as I have put it together."

"Very good, Chauncey, so you shall. I will charge myself with that part of your intentions, at any rate. But no one will steal into your Collection, be sure; no one knows the value of these things."

"That is not all," he went on, whispering. "I am afraid of her, Joe—I am desperately afraid of her. When night comes, I go away and lock myself up in Gerald's room—you know: the

west wing, where there's only one door of communication, and I barricade that for fear she should get in."

"By Jove!" said the doctor, "this is conjugal felicity. This is an encouragement for a young bachelor like me to get married, isn't it?"

"Once in, I feel safe. I've got my pistols loaded, and there's a chain on the door. They shall never take me alive, Joe—never!"

"Come, Chauncey, do not talk nonsense."

"You I can trust; you would never betray your cousin, if only for the sake of old kindness, to say nothing of the family name. I never regretted telling *you*, Joe. But oh! if I had only kept it back from *her!*"

"Really, Chauncey, I must say, considering what humbug the whole thing is, it was worse than folly to tell her."

"It was not my fault, Joe. Why did you send her to me? It was lonely in the evenings, and I got to sit with her to escape the—you know—the faces, because I was miserable and afraid of being left alone. Then we used to have brandy and water, and she would talk to me. She's a clever woman. Oh, Joe, what a

clever woman she is! And she hid nothing from me, you know; told me all her life—"

Joseph smiled.

"How she had been on the stage, and all. The evenings were pleasant after she came; and then I told her how lonely I was, and how miserable; and one night—oh, Joe!—one night I told her everything, everything from the beginning. She heard me right through, and the next day she said that to make it safe I was to marry her right off. Because, you see, I was in her power."

"In her power? Ugh!"

The doctor's disgust that any one besides himself should have this man in his power was too great for any words.

He grunted.

"Go on, Chauncey. A pretty mess you've made of it for yourself and me too. Go on."

"She gave me no rest after that. She was at me all day. She made me tell the story of—you know—till I used to go into the woods, and shout and scream—I could not help it, Joe, indeed I could not—in order to get the dreadful thing out of my head. Oh, miserable wretch

that I am! Why did the Lord suffer this evil to fall upon me? Why did I hate the man who never did me any harm at all, but only good? Joe, Joe, she went further; she said that if by any one telling, or any subsequent inquiries being made, I should be taken to Exeter—Exeter!" he cried, with a pitiful sob in his voice, "where I've been a county magistrate myself—tried for murder, and"—he dropped his voice to a whisper—"hanged, Joe, you, she said, would only be transported for life, as an accessory and accomplice."

"Oh, I am to get transportation for life, am I? Good, Mrs. Chacomb; very good."

"Buy her off, Joe—buy her off. She is dangerous."

"Not she, Chauncey. Don't be afraid. What else did she say?"

"She said you sent her down here because you thought she was your tool, and would do what you told her to do."

"She's a devil!" growled the doctor, moved to pity and wrath by the sight of his cousin's misery. Most people would resent the ill-treatment of a servant, pet, or slave, always supposed

to be their own peculiar property. Chauncey was Joseph's own property, and here he was actually being bullied and ill-treated by somebody else! "Chauncey," he explained, "I give you my word of honour that I sent you this woman because I thought she would be an intelligent and kind-hearted housekeeper for you, and because, my dear fellow, I was afraid to leave you by yourself."

"Yes; it was very kind of you, Joe. I have not been myself since that dreadful day. Then she made me marry her; told me that it was the only escape for me from you; that she knew how to manage me, and that— Hush, here she comes."

The door opened, and the second Mrs. Chacomb sailed into the room, gorgeously attired in silks, which would have looked more than splendid had they been in the fashion; as it was, they were twenty years behind it, and so presented a grotesque appearance.

"Joe!" she cried—"I beg your pardon, Dr. Chacomb. My husband always calls you Joe."

"Pray call me Joe, Mrs. Chacomb," he said,

politely. "We are cousins, you know, now. We are not what we were once."

Which was true.

"We shall have dinner as soon as you are ready, Joe," she replied, graciously, but with an obvious uneasiness. "Why did you not say you were coming? I am afraid you will fare badly."

As he left the room, the doctor heard an angry whisper—

"What have you told him?"

"Nothing—nothing," replied her hapless lord and master, relapsing into his usual melancholy taciturnity.

Joseph came down again quickly, and gave his arm to the ex-housekeeper with much ceremony. He noticed with surprise that she squeezed it affectionately.

The dinner was wretched—a fowl badly cooked by the little maid, and potatoes nearly hard. To make up, there was a bottle of port, which appeared to be a standing part of the evening meal, put out for the use of Mrs. Chacomb. The doctor took his share, however.

The conversation languished, and Joseph

found it insufferably dull. The woman at one end of the table, with her airs and affectations, disgusted him; the man at the other moved his innermost soul to pity and contempt; the little girl who waited on them, the only other creature in the big house, trembled at every movement of her mistress.

"Where are your servants, Mrs. Chacomb?" he asked, when the girl had left them.

"Gone, Joe," she replied, with a greater confidence in using the Christian name than she had shown before dinner. "Gone, and a good riddance, too."

"Get some more—get some more at once. Chacomb Hall must not be left to the care of a child."

The woman resented his tone, but said nothing.

They did not adjourn, but sat round the fire after dinner, in silence.

The clock struck nine; the squire rose solemnly, and shook hands with his cousin.

"Joe, you are more than welcome here. I am *very* glad you have come. Keep on coming. Come as often as you can."

Then he took a candle and went away.

"My husband's habits are peculiar," said Mrs. Chacomb. "At present he occupies the empty wing, Mr. Gerald's wing."

"I see."

Then the little girl brought brandy and cold water, and asked if there was anything else.

"You have looked to all the locks and bolts?"

"Yes, my lady."

Mrs. Chacomb had taught her to say "my lady," as a sort of reminder that she was no longer a housekeeper.

"Then you may go to bed."

"Do you mean to tell me that the poor child sleeps all alone in the empty servants' room?"

"No; she sleeps in the little room next to mine, the dressing-room."

And then the two were left alone in the great empty house, about which not a sound was heard save the cracking of the furniture and the wind in the trees outside.

"Lively, Joe, isn't it?" asked Mrs. Chacomb. "This is how I spend the evenings. I am not

going to carry on like this always, though, and I let you know it."

"Julia," said the doctor, "what did you do it for? You have really made a great fool of yourself. I expected better things."

"Why does any woman marry a man who is a fool, and old to boot? Because he is rich."

"Of course, and because he is cracked, and you thought you could do what you liked with his money."

"Well, you've been doing what you like with it for four years."

"I was his cousin; you were, Julia, his housekeeper."

"Never mind what I was. I *am* his wife."

"So I suppose. And what if there was to be a row?"

"Ah, that would be bad, would it not?" she replied, with a cunning smile. "I should have to confess that my husband is a murderer, and his cousin an accomplice."

"Julia, don't be a fool. You don't mean to say you believe—"

"I do, though. I believe every word of it."

"Then leave off believing it, and try to be

rational. The row I mean is quite a different thing. Suppose I was to say, 'This man has been forced into an unequal and unhappy marriage by a woman whom I sent down to take care of him—a woman who wormed herself into his confidence, and traded on his fears; who found out the point in which his lunacy shows itself, and persuaded him that his hallucinations were a reality.' What should we see then?"

"I don't know, Joe. It would be an interesting thing to see."

"Do you imagine, Julia, that I cannot prove the death of Captain Revel to have been the purest accident?"

"What proof have you?"

"Read the account of the inquest, if you can get it. If not, wait till my proof is wanted again."

"I believe it would be awkward, in spite of what you say, if I were to declare that there is no hallucination at all."

"Melodramatic, Julia—not awkward at all. Effective but useless. It reminds me of Sadler's Wells days, when you were an innocent

and jolly young actress, not a scheming woman, compassing a selfish end by cruel means. Yes, cruel, Julia. It was a cruel thing to torture him as you did; and mark me, if you do it again, if you dare to allude to his miserable delusion, you leave Chacomb Hall at once. There, if you refuse, I take the thing into my own hands, and get a separation, exposing all the means—the unworthy means—used to force the poor man into a marriage with you. How would you like the servants one after the other giving their evidence?"

A random shot, but it told.

She was silent.

"One more thing, my friend Julia. Whatever power you had over Chauncey as his housekeeper you have lost by becoming his wife. You can't give testimony for or against your husband. It is a cruel and wicked law in most cases. In yours, my dear creature, it seems a most beneficent regulation. So, you see, you have been too clever for your own interests."

"At all events, I am his wife. And now, Joe, we will leave all stupid talk about delu-

sions. Chauncey may be mad or not, just as you like. Meantime, I am the mistress of Chacomb Hall. I mean to receive the rents, and to have things exactly as I please."

"I was coming to that point next," said the doctor. "The fact is that the news of your marriage forced me to look into my own rights and powers. You know that I have managed the Chacomb property for four years. Pray understand at once that I intend to go on managing everything down here—and everybody. I am resolved that the Chacomb property shall be wisely administered, and the present owner shall be kindly treated. If you attempt to interfere, I will separate you from your husband on the ground of his lunacy. I nominated myself before as the trustee of the estates, and if I meet with opposition I will be nominated by the Court of Chancery. Be under no false impression of your own importance — you have none. You are of less account now than you were before your marriage, because then you were a trusted servant, and you are now—or you may be if you choose—a suspected enemy."

"Pray go on," she said. "I am to be nothing, I suppose."

"Nothing at all. You may keep up your own dignity as before. You will be under my orders, or you will leave Chacomb Hall."

"What are your orders?"

"Kindness and care for Chauncey; that the place is kept up properly; a quiet and decorous life for yourself."

"And if I refuse?"

"Separation, and as small an allowance as I can persuade the lawyers to make you."

"And Chauncey?"

"In that case, I should get him a keeper of the other sex."

She poured out some brandy and water, and gave it him with a cheerful smile.

"Joe," she said, "you know I would not be such a bad lot as to round on your cousin, whatever he's done—though how in the world you can call it a delusion the Lord only knows. As for your orders, why, you dear old boy, when did I ever disobey you, except in marrying that poor little undersized Richard the Third sort of madman? Let us be friends."

"Only on condition of your carrying out faithfully all I want," said the doctor.

"Of course I will," she replied, with a wonderful clearing up of her face. Some women look so much better when they are humble and obedient. "Then let us have no more quarrelling. After all, I do like a masterful man. As for you, Joe, you always were masterful. I give in. I will do whatever you like. Shake hands, old fellow, and forget the row."

He shook her ringed and jewelled fingers with more ceremony than she cared for. A little of the old ease and familiarity would have been more agreeable to her.

"We will be friends," said the doctor, "so long as—"

"Yes, yes, I know. You shall be obeyed. Did I not always obey you when you hadn't a red cent in your pocket, and was only Joe Chacomb—rattling Joe—marching about behind the scenes as if the place belonged to you? Those were the real jolly times. Oysters and stout—"

"Oysters were sixpence a dozen then," said the doctor, with a sigh of sympathy. "The wind

used indeed to be tempered to the shorn lamb. How the deuce do medical students manage now, I wonder?"

"You sang a good song then, Joe."

"I did," he said, shaking his head.

"Do you remember that night when we had supper after Boxing Night at the Wells? Lotty Vandeleur—Wicks her real name was—and I danced after supper, for you to decide which danced best. You gave me the prize, I remember. This was the step."

She sprang to her feet, gathered up her skirts, and began to dance after the old-fashioned Columbine manner, which had, perhaps, certain advantages over modern burlesque dancing. It was a curious sight, this stout and jolly-looking woman of forty gravely pirouetting, with her heavy silks gathered up under her arm. The doctor looked on and laughed.

"Let me smoke, Ju, and it will be almost like old times."

He lit a cigar, and they fell back on talk, and reminiscences of a *jeunesse orageuse.* At two o'clock in the morning he got up, and shook himself together.

"By Jove!" he said, "we were almost forgetting that I am forty-nine and you are forty. Good night, Ju."

"Good night, Joe. *On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.* As if you are ever going to forget the jolly days when you were young. Lord! I saw Lotty Vandeleur the other day —she keeps a lodging-house in the Hampstead-road—and we talked about you. Joe, you were a bad boy—oh, a shocking bad boy! You are only better now because you are richer."

"Good night, Mrs. Chauncey Chacomb."

"Good night again, Dr. Joseph Chacomb, Physician to the Royal Hospital for Gout. Butter would not melt in your mouth now, would it? You do not remember the taste of oysters and stout, do you? You never heard of a ballet, did you? You never sat up half the night, with a houp-houp-houp-la! tra-la-la-la! and a party of youth and beauty, did you? Gravesend on Sunday is a thing you never heard of, isn't it? Oh, Joe, to think that we should ever get old and be hypocrites! To think that we can only last ten years or so, and then have to give up being jolly, and pretend we like being miserable! Isn't it

too bad? And, Joe, Joe, did you ever think that I should be such a fool, such a great, big, silly fool, as to marry that—that—"

"My cousin Chauncey, Julia? I did not think it, nor did you. But you did it. To know ourselves, Mrs. Chauncey, is the end of all philosophy."

CHAPTER II.

MARION was at work before Adie was dressed or Fred had risen, when a letter was brought her, addressed Marion Revel, *tout court*—without, that is, the ordinary gracious prefix of miss or madam. The writing was slovenly and half educated, the spelling was loose; but the postmark was Comb Leigh, and Marion tore it open with a trembling hand. She read it with bewilderment.

"MARION REVEL" (it began)—"My husband has received the letter you caused to be sent to him. He wishes me to say that he will give you nothing. That is all. For my own part, I beg to assure you, with the most profound respect, that you can do no harm to him, and that

you had better not try it on. I defy you.—
Yours to command, "JULIA CHACOMB."

"P.S.—I know all about it."

There was a second postscript, written in a shaky hand, outside the envelope—

"She won't let me send you any money. Ask Joseph.—C. C."

What did it mean? Marion read and re-read the letter. Presently Adie appeared.

"Read that extraordinary letter, Adie dear. Tell me what it means, if you can."

"It is from the new Mrs. Chacomb. I met the doctor yesterday—"

"Adie, I hope you remembered your promise not to speak to him about—"

"We did not talk about you, dear. I told him about Fred and the five pounds; and he laughed, and offered to give me some more."

"You did not take it?"

"No, Marion, I did not. Then he told me about Chauncey Chacomb. He has married his housekeeper. I suppose the name of the lady is Julia. Evidently it is from her. Poor Mr. Chacomb! He used to be kind to us in his way."

"But what does the letter mean?"

"It means, Marion, I suspect—it means that Fred has been writing for money."

"Oh, Adie, he would not—he could not!"

"He could, because he has written at different times to everybody who would lend him any. My dear Marion, Fred is one of those lazy lilies who neither can nor will toil and spin. He only borrows."

"But from Chauncey Chacomb! Oh, it would be impossible for him to borrow of Chauncey Chacomb."

"He wrote once to the doctor, I know, because the doctor told me so; and he is always writing to Lord Rodney Benbow."

"Oh, Fred, Fred, what will become of us?" sighed Marion.

She thought of what the doctor had prophesied—that all the nobleness left in her brother would drop out of him little by little, till there should be no spark left at all; and she felt that this was a beginning of the end. What was she to do?

"It is clear what will become of Fred," said her sister, who was in a harsh mood towards her

brother, in consequence of the embargo laid upon the four sovereigns. "It is clear enough that Fred never means to do anything except live upon his friends. Marion, don't say anything. I am as fond of my brother as you can be, but I am not so blind to his faults. I told you about the money yesterday. In the evening there was nothing left; he had paid away the whole of it in a single day. He does not go into the City at all, as he pretends; he spends the whole day —think of it, Marion, the whole day long—in billiard-rooms, playing pool for sixpences. When he is lucky, he wins ten or fifteen shillings a day, and sometimes more; with this he goes to a restaurant, and dines well. When he is unlucky, he makes you give him money for dinner, and dines well too."

"Don't, Adie! You are unjust."

"No, I am true. Whatever we do, Marion—whatever *you* do, for I can do nothing—we shall be always burdened with the weight of our brother, who is more idle than the shifting shadows."

The door opened, and he came in, fresh from dressing, radiant, handsome, and graceful.

Marion gave him the letter to read.

"Who is Julia Chacomb?" he asked, with the least possible blush.

"Mr. Chacomb is married again—to his housekeeper."

"Oh, I wish I had known it," said Fred.

"Frederick, is it possible that you have written for money to Mr. Chauncey Chacomb?"

"Yes, Marion, I have." He tried to put on a defiant and even consciously innocent air, but it was a failure; his eyes dropped before her look. "Yes, Marion, I have."

"Do you often write to people for money?"

"Sometimes I do. I write to whomever I think will help me. I am the head of the house, and I act as I think best in the interests of us all."

The girls looked at each other—Marion in dismay.

"Fred, I am in earnest," she said, after a little. "You are not to write to any one again for money. It is dishonourable."

"I am the best judge of that," he said.

"Then judge so for yourself. Above everything, remember, once for all, that I will not have any letters written to Chauncey Chacomb. There are reasons—oh, heaven! are there not

reasons?—why we can never, never, not in the last extremities of poverty, apply to Chauncey Chacomb."

"You talk strangely, Marion," said her brother.

"You talk wisely, Marion," said her sister.

"You forget, perhaps," continued Frederick, "that I am the master of my own actions."

"No, I do not forget. You will do what you think best, without any interference from us. But one thing I can do—"

"Marion!" cried Adie, alarmed.

"Adie, let me say it for once, and have done with it. The time is come when we must understand each other. Our father was the most honourable man in all the world—thank God for it!—and we, Adie and I, try to follow in his steps. You may stay with us as long as you will do the same. We shall not grudge you all you want, if we can afford it. We will give you what we can, we will spare and save for you. But I will not, I cannot, keep even my own brother in the same house with me if I cease to think him—a gentleman."

Fred was perfectly silent.

"Fred, dear," she continued, caressing his head as if he were a child, "will you promise me—promise me, my dear—to write no more such letters? If we cannot give you quite all the luxuries you would like, we will give you all we can. The other day Adie went without food all day, in order that you might dine well. You took all the money that our only friend had given her. To-day you shall have what we have, only leave us enough to buy something—it matters little what—to eat. Do what you like, my brother, if you cannot work or find work to do, but spare us dishonour. Let us keep our name, at least, from the mouths of people. Surely, this is but a little thing to ask you."

Fred rose with something like an oath upon his lips; but it was bravado, not rage. He was not so hardened as not to feel the justice of his sister's reproaches.

"Let me go, Marion. One would think I was a—a—devil—a fiend. Is it I who keep you starving? Is it I who keep you living in this miserable hole, when—"

"It is, Fred—you, and nobody else," said Adie. "Marion has made nearly three pounds

a week for months. With that and her own income we could all three live in a cottage, where there was fresh air at least. Out of the three you have taken two. And what have you done with it?"

"Why should I not write to Chauncey Chacomb? He was my father's best friend—his only friend. It is his duty to help us. Marion, you forget yourself strangely when you lecture me on points of honour. Remember, if you please, that I have all my life associated with gentlemen and men of honour. I have—"

"Once more, my brother, understand me clearly. So long as I can make the money for you I shall not complain, provided—I will not repeat it."

He left his breakfast untasted, seized his hat, and went out.

"I am glad you spoke, Marion dear," said Adie; "not that it will do much good, but it shows Fred what we think. My dear, I will try to get something for myself to do—I will indeed—so as to relieve you a little."

Marion shook her head, and laughed through her tears.

"Poor Adie! I do not think you will do much good, but you may try. Women's work is not for girls who have no training and no art. Go and consult my wrinkled little friend, the schoolmaster. You can get nothing but good advice from him."

"Why cannot I paint like you, Marion? It seems so easy."

Adie's notions of art were limited. She could understand colour, as was proved by her dress, but she had no more feeling for form than generally belongs to her sex. It is strange that the sense of beauty—the sixth sense—is so deficient in one-half of the human race. Men very early learned it: witness the names in that brief chronicle of antediluvian women. Eve's name means breath of life: she is simply the mother, because poor Adam, who had no means of comparison, probably failed to appreciate her beauty at its true worth. Presently we get other names, which show the birth and the progress of Art, which is the recognition of beauty. Adah, "the beautiful," and Zillah, "the shadow," are wives of the first antediluvians who had a discerning eye. After Zillah came her daughter Naamah,

"the lovely," who marks the period when men first began to be carried out of themselves by the radiance of a woman's beauty. The way was thus prepared for Helen. Philandering is, indeed, of extreme antiquity; for Lamech, who "slew a young man to his hurt"—probably out of jealousy—was its inventor. But neither Naamah, nor Zillah, nor Adah understood, we may be sure, her own beauty, or the reason of the power she possessed over men.

Fred Revel went away in a sore and savage frame of mind. Marion's plain speaking humiliated him—everything that was true seemed to humiliate him. And, moreover, there were anxieties and difficulties of which Marion knew nothing—which, if he dared to tell her, might bring some excuse for his letter to Chauncey Chacomb. He was in a sore scrape—a far worse scrape than Marion suspected.

Life looked black indeed to the young man, as he turned into the street that bright spring morning. It was not only that he had spent on himself money which might have given comfort to his sisters' lives, nor was it that he had written letters to every man who might help

him with money. As for the former, perhaps he did not know the sacrifices daily made on his behalf, or if he knew, he set the knowledge aside with the reflection that the condition of things was only temporary, and would be changed—as soon as he got his appointment; and as for borrowing money, anybody might do that. To be sure, in every man's case there is a limit to the borrowing power; and Fred had arrived at his extreme tether, without being known, in any single case, to have repaid again. He borrowed, like Dicky Carew, from everybody—even from that worthy himself. Unlike Dicky, whose little earnings were always encroached upon by his own habits of lending to brethren in distress, Fred Revel never lent to any one. What he got, he spent in fostering the delusion that he belonged to the wealthy—at least, to the easy class. It was not selfish so much as foolish. He lived for ever in that fool's paradise about which we have spoken before. He told himself a thousand times a day that better days were coming, and he looked for the better days to that most unsteady of supporters, a patron. Some men are so weak that they *cannot* place

the real situation before themselves; they live in an atmosphere of self-deceit of their own making; they veil their figures in a cloud, which hides the contours and obscures the surroundings.

There was one great reason why Fred should not run in a groove with the rest of the world—he had no money, and he could not work. That was it: he could not work. He had never been able to study at school. It was a grand mistake to send him to Oxford. He cared nothing for reading. Unless he had work in the open air, he could live but one life—that of the *lazzaroni*, who bask in the sun, and let the days slip by. He ought to have been a sailor.

Modern society takes no account of these unfortunates; and yet it is this class which feels most deeply the consequences of man's first disobedience, and his fall. They are the brethren most to be pitied, for, with them, the earning of bread by desk labour is torture, mental and physical. We do not pity them even — we only despise them. The average workman has no words to express his contempt for him who cannot work; the structure of society has no place

for him. Perhaps, in a more advanced civilization, the disease will be recognized as a somewhat uncommon but incurable phenomenon, and hospitals will be provided, with gardens, music, dancing, and art—everything but love-making, because the disease may be hereditary—for the lazy ones of the earth. Of course, the accidental possession of money will not be considered an excuse for keeping out of the hospital; that, on the other hand, will help to furnish the less fortunate with the graces of life.

There was, then, a more bitter sting than Marion knew of when she roused herself to say, for the first time in her life, words of bitterness to this shallow-hearted and feather-brained brother.

And then there was Winifred to think of.

He walked, with those uneven steps which mark a mind ill at ease, and with quick, impatient gestures, to his favourite haunt, the billiard-room. No one was there but the marker, practising with infinite patience a stroke with which to astonish the habitual players.

"I want to know," Fred began—"I want to know if you can do anything for me about that money I borrowed?"

"Nothing. I told you so at the beginning. That's the sixth time running I've made this stroke. If he won't renew, you must pay up."

"I can't pay up."

The marker whistled meaningly, and chalked his cue.

"I have tried, but I do not know what to do. It's thirty-seven pounds three and tenpence."

"Thirty-seven, three, ten. Ah! And, counting interest, say forty; there is always something or other which they put on. Saul is a devil of a fellow at totting up."

"You took me to him."

"I did—that's quite true. I told you he would let you have money, and he did. At good interest, and on security, Saul will let anybody have money. He would discount a bill for the devil himself, with pleasure, if there was a respectable name at the back. You signed a paper, and took what he gave you."

"Ten pounds and a box of cigars. That was all I got."

"It doesn't seem much; but there, you know, you would have it; and you were so certain that you would get your appointment before this,

that you would have taken a thousand if he'd let you. Come, now, don't blame me."

"What can he do?" Fred asked, in an anxious tone.

"I don't know. If there is any way of getting his money back, he will try that way. If there isn't, he'll make it hot for you some other way. Lord bless you, I knew how it would happen. I've gone through it all myself, only it was a long time ago. You must pay up, or he'll put on the screw."

The speaker was a short, thickset man, whose beard was grey, and his hair touched with grey —a man well on the shady side of fifty.

"I saw it all coming from the very beginning, and here it is. You have got a nice, light touch with the cue, and you come here for the sixpenny lives. You bounce about your family; but you've got no money, and know no trade. There is only one trade open to you."

"What is that?" asked the young man, with a flush.

"Mine. I was a gentleman once. Not for very long; but a gentleman to begin with. My father served his Majesty, King George III., and

carried colours in the Peninsula. How did I come down to this? By the very same road that you are travelling, Mr. Revel; exactly—the very same road. Young gentlemen who dislike work, and can play billiards, take to playing for money. Those who play billiards for a living always end in marking at billiards for a living. Lord bless you, it's as plain as a pike-staff. Go the round of the rooms, ask them all to tell you what brought them to it, you will hear much about the same story. You wouldn't shake hands with me now, would you? I don't mind it, my boy—not a bit. My word, I was a much finer fellow than you at one time."

He sat down, and prepared to reveal his own story with considerable enjoyment.

"We wore whiskers then, and no beard—only Cavalry men wore a moustache. We had long hair brushed in waves. We had frock coats tight at the waist; high shirt collars and large neckties. I think I see myself now—going down Bond-street, with Captain Rook and Lord Deuceace, arm in arm, as if the pavement belonged to us. They both went to the dogs worse than me, poor beggars! There, you've

read Thackeray's History of Deuceace, of course. I always wanted to sit to Thackeray myself, only I never got the chance. I would have put him up to a tip or two.

"As to being satisfied with my present aristocratic mode of life, I can't say I am. Would I change it? I certainly would if I could. But there's only one state of life for which I would change it, and that's a regular allowance—say three pounds a week, enough for my quiet brandy and water, and my pipe. After all, it is not so very bad. None of the crew ever come here; and if they did, they would not know their old chum. As for the broken-down ones—that's most of the set—we never speak when we do meet. We pass on, and pretend not to know each other. Deuceace went to the bad altogether, as you know, perhaps. I think the turf *is* worse than the billiard-table. Here, you see, you only ruin yourself. Over the races you ruin the poor devils who *will* bet as well. Cards are bad, because in the long run you take to playing with marked packs. That's what Captain Rook came to grief over. When I last heard of him it was from Charley Fetherstone. He saw him at

the Grand Prix in Paris, with a *pari mutuel*, and in the evening came across him in a two-franc hell. Now, at billiards you may play dark, and that isn't a nice thing for a gentleman to come to; but, damn it, that's the worst you can do. No one can say a worse thing of me than that. After all, as you see, you can always pick up an honest living when you've forgotten that you are a gentleman."

Fred groaned. The marker warmed up in his recollections, and went on:—

"Charley Fetherstone has not done so well, though. He would combine the three: gambled, betted, *and* played billiards. A very dashing and brilliant fellow he was; but somehow it all came to nothing. He should have stuck to one thing, you see, like me. What with being ducked for a welsher at Hampton, expelled his club for turning up the king at écarté, and getting known all over London for dark play, he hadn't a chance in the end. I met him a few months ago carrying a pair of advertising boards. Think of that! And Charley once the dandiest young fellow in all New Bond-street. I was coming along here, with my old briar-root in my

mouth, when I came alongside of him. I saw his eyes flash, and then he dropped them, and plodded on like most of the board-carrying lot, noticing nothing. I couldn't help myself. I had five shillings in my pocket—two half-crowns—and I slipped one into his hand. 'Take that, mate,' I says—rough, you know. 'What's this for?' said Charley, staring at me, with the best bit of acting you ever saw in your life—'I never saw you before, mate.' 'No more you did, old fellow,' I said; 'quite so—no more you did. We never clapped eyes on each other till this blessed minute, did we? That's why I gave you the half-crown. Better luck to you, Charley Fetherstone!' He never answered, but he dropped his head, and went on plodding in the mud. Poor devil! poor devil!"

Fred listened with a swelling heart. Was all the world, then, going to prophesy disaster?

"Well, young gentleman, that's all. I've told you your lines as near as I can read them. You can play billiards, and you *can't* work, and you don't want."

Perhaps he spoke out of pure kindliness, and from a desire to warn the young man;

perhaps from the cynical depths of a dark experience.

"What security did you give Saul for the money?"

"A bill of sale on my furniture."

"Very well, then; let him have the furniture. What does a young fellow like you want with furniture? Your chambers are in the Temple, are they not? Let them clear you out, and be hanged to them! Go home and put everything valuable in your pocket. I remember when Dick Latitat, the lawyer—he's a judge in India now—found out there was going to be an execution put into his chambers, he moved everything out at dead of night to a friend who lived opposite, and in the morning, when the Philistines came, the spoil was gone. Not that I should advise you to do that, because a bill of sale is a serious thing. Let them take the lot, and you'll be easier without it."

Fred sat down on one of the seats that ran round the room, and looked blankly before him. A billiard-marker! Dr. Chacomb had advised him to become an advertising tout. Such was the opinion of the world about him. He could

not even reply to the marker's prophecy; for it seemed as if suddenly the very foundations of his life were giving way beneath him. Where could he get this money? And if he did not get it, how to break the blow to Marion? For he knew well enough the immediate effect of his inability to pay. He had given, in fact, a bill of sale on the furniture, nominally his own, in his capacity as "head of the house."

"Come, don't give way," said his friend. "You owe me a matter of five shillings or so; we will chalk that off, if you're so hard up as all that. Try and borrow the money. See Saul, and ask him to make terms."

Fred went away and sought the money-lender. He was a middle-aged man, dressed in sporting guise. He sat in a little office, without any sign of office-work except a safe; there was a table, and there were chairs. The table was covered with sporting papers, and Mr. Saul was reading one of them. His manner was not calculated to prejudice a stranger in his favour: it was uneasy, while it affected ease; it was half familiar and half distant; the manner of one who is an Ishmaelite in the world—feared and dis-

trusted by the very men whom he most obliges. It is the penalty of the profession. Money-lending, the mystery of the hangman, and the discharge of the duties of sheriff's officer, may rank together as the three least desirable of callings.

"True to time, Mr. Revel," he said. "I expected you in a day or two. Sit down. Come to discharge your little account? It is not due yet, though—not for three days. Let me see." He consulted a note-book, and opened his safe. "Here is the account—thirty-nine nineteen and eleven."

"Why don't you say forty at once? And to think that it is only six months ago, and all I got was ten pounds!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Revel. You took ten pounds in gold, and a box of most valuable cigars, which you might have sold for— Ah, well, we need not go into that. Shall I write you a receipt?"

"No; I have not got any money."

The man looked at him with a feigned surprise.

"No money? That is awkward, for the note will be due in three days."

"I can't help it. You must give me a little time. Come, Mr. Saul, you do not want the money to-day or to-morrow. Give me a month to look about me."

"That is not the way to conduct business, Mr. Revel. The little trifle—it is certainly a very small sum—is wanted by me imperatively, to make up a large sum due to a friend, a debt of honour. In fact, I must have it. You gave me a bill of sale, did you not? Yes. Really, it would be very disagreeable— Come, Mr. Revel, you will go away and borrow the money of some friend, I am sure. I would not press you if I were not obliged. I tell you what I will do. Find me a good name, and I will do another bill for you. I will give you three days yet." This was a gracious concession, because three days is the exact space allowed by the law. "You shall have three days, and then— But no doubt we shall have a better account in that time. Anything like good security, my dear sir, good security—reversion, mortgage, post-obits, the name of a good friend—I will oblige you in any way possible. You shall never call *me* a hard man."

There was one chance yet. He would go and see his old and long-suffering friend, Lord Rodney Benbow. Lord Rodney's wild oats had long since been sown. He was going in for political life; he was private secretary to the Earl of Cromarty; he was proposing to stand for a family borough in the Conservative interest at the next election; he was already a most respectable man; and it was not at all his intention to keep up an intimacy with a man like his former friend Revel, who was just hovering with uncertain wing on the outskirts of civilized society. He received him, however, with a show of the old cordiality, and shook hands with him.

"What is it, Revel? Are you in a mess again?"

"I am always in a mess."

"You certainly always are. How much is it this time?"

"Forty pounds. I borrowed it six months ago. Got ten pounds and a box of cigars of Saul the money-lender."

"I know the scoundrel well."

"I gave a bill of sale for it on the furniture."

"I was not aware that you had any furniture."

Fred coloured. He had not thought it necessary to inform his distinguished friend of the exact conditions of his life.

"And now you cannot meet it. Well, let the man clear off the sticks. I suppose the furniture of your chamber is not very precious to you." He, like the marker, thought Fred was living by himself. "He will probably lose by the bargain. Let him come and take it."

"I thought that perhaps you would—"

"Lend you the money? My dear fellow, I haven't got it. Do you know that I have lent you more than fifty during the last two years? I don't want to bother you about it, and I dare say you will be all right some day; but a younger son has not too much to spare. Why don't you do something for yourself?"

"Did you remember to speak about my application at the Colonial Office?"

"I did. It's no good, my boy. They are pestered with applications. There are seven hundred names down at the Colonial Office already. They will not give you anything. You

must abandon the notion of a Government appointment altogether."

"And at the Foreign Office? I know French."

"Everybody knows French. Come, Revel, let me speak frankly. You are going downhill. It's a bad sign when a man borrows sovereigns. And now there's this business of the bill. Set to work on something—what the deuce does it matter what? A man can do anything nowadays. Why, my younger brother is going into a merchant's office next week. Don't fly into a rage with an old friend. Give up running after shadows. You will get nothing from the Government, nothing at all; there is no department of the Civil Service that you can get into by examination; and as your father did not do the sensible thing with you, and give you a chance in the army, you must try something else. Be reasonable, old boy. You and I were too much together once. It did not hurt me much to get rusticated, but it played the deuce with you. Try and see things in their right light. Give up family tradition and Oxford prejudice, and take anything. No one whose opinion is worth anything to you will think

twice about what you are. And now, Fred, my boy, good-bye. Let the furniture go to the money-lending fellow; give up billiards and the West-end, and go in for work, like me. If I can help you, I will. Only let the world see that you can help yourself."

Fred mechanically took his hand and left him. It was dismissal. There was no hope from that quarter, nor from any other. In three days' time the money-lender would execute his threat and sell them up. Sharp lessons, but they came, like the admonition to the unfortunates in Tartarus, too late.

"Discite justitiam moniti, et non temnere divos."

"Admirable advice!" says Scarron the scoffer; "but what is the good of it *down there?*"

Quite so. Fred had learned from the doctor that he was a lazy *vaurien;* from Marion that he had disgraced and dishonoured himself by writing begging letters; from the billiard-marker that his ultimate profession was undoubtedly to mark at billiards; and from Lord Rodney Benbow that he was certainly going downhill. It was quite true; but he had got lower than any-

body knew, and now he was going to be found out by Marion. All the humiliations he had experienced were nothing in comparison with this. Winifred would know it, too. Adrienne would know it. They would have bare walls for shelter, for everything would be seized. What could he do? How fend off the blow?

Winifred would cry, and believe him when he told her something in mitigation of the offence; Adie would laugh bitterly, and smite him with winged words; but this was nothing compared with the reproach he would read in the eyes of Marion.

CHAPTER III.

"AND now, Adie," said Marion, "let us forget Fred's sins, poor fellow. See, the picture is finished—actually finished. I can do no more to it."

"I am sure," said Adie, who was a critic after the fashion of those who, in trying to say smooth things, always contrive to wound the vanity of an artist—"I am sure I have seen many worse pictures in the Exhibition."

Poor Marion!

If she had shown her sister a poem, Adie would have assured her, with a genial smile, that she had seen worse verses in print; if a tale, that inferior productions had appeared in the *Housemaid's Journal.* And then Adie would have thought that she was conveying a rare and merited compliment to her sister

"I *do* like the face of the girl," she said—as if, bad as the thing was, there were some merits. "I suppose because it is painted after me. And it all seems so pretty, and you are very clever, Marion.

"Not that it is the slightest use," she went on, dolefully. "You will not be able to sell it, I suppose, unless Burls takes it of you for a tenth part of what it is worth. Marion, we are an unlucky family. Sometimes I think we shall never get out of our degradation."

"Not degradation, Adie."

"Yes," she said—"disgrace and degradation. You toiling day and night for nothing; I dependent on you. Fred playing billiards for sixpences. It *is* disgrace, Marion."

She had lost all faith in her sister's power of success. Two years of drudgery seemed to her conclusive that Marion would never be an artist.

"I will tell you a secret, Adie. Dr. Chacomb is going to try for the Royal Academy with it. He is coming here to-day."

"It is very good of Dr. Chacomb," replied her sister, who was in a despondent mood—

very good, indeed. But it is no use. They won't take it; if they take it, they will hang it where no one can see it. It will not be sold, and then you will have it back again—poor dear Marion!"

"Perhaps the bad luck will turn, Adie. At all events, it is always right to go on working. Don't be down-hearted, dear."

"I must be. I found out another thing yesterday. Promise me, Marion, if I tell it you, to keep it a secret."

"What is it, Adie?"

"Winifred Owen is a very pretty girl, Marion."

"Well?"

"And a ladylike girl."

"Yes."

"And—and—how should you like Winifred Owen to become Winifred Revel?"

Marion only opened her eyes.

"You may make up your mind to that event, my dear," Adie went on, with the calmness of despair. "It will be quite a marriage of romance. He has nothing; she has nothing. They will live upon love, without even a cottage. What do you think of it?"

"Poor Winifred," said Marion. "I will speak to Fred at once."

"No, do not, Marion—let things go on. Now you know why I am so cross with him this morning. It does seem too bad. He ought to be content with dragging his sisters down, and spare poor little Winifred. It is too late, Marion. She loves him."

"How do you know, Adie?"

"Because I can see, my dear; because I have got eyes in my head; because when girls love people they look in one way, and only one way; because Winifred is carried away with his good looks and winning ways. Poor Fred would win the heart of an icicle if he set about it in earnest."

"It may stimulate him, to be engaged."

"No, Marion. Nothing will ever stimulate Fred to do any work. I know my dear Fred. He will just go on for ever as he is going on now; he will spoil her life as he has spoiled yours. Poor little Winifred! And how can they marry? Think of living on year after year, in love with a man whom you cannot hope to marry. Marion, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

For her sister's cheek paled, and she sat down suddenly, as if Adie had struck her some sharp blow—which, indeed, was the case, though she did not know it.

"Poor Fred! He does not tell us any more, as he did at first, what he does and where he goes. That is the worst sign. I feel as if we were becoming outcasts. Why are we alone in the world in having no friends and relations? Where are your mother's people, Marion? Where are mine? Where are all our French cousins? Surely the Revolution did not kill everybody. Did my father have no friends among his brother-officers who would help us if they were asked?"

"My dear, have patience."

"Patience! Oh, Marion, I think we have had patience enough. I hate it—this cramped, miserable life. I have no more patience with it at all. Our hopes are bound by a fraction or so, more or less. We live from day to day; we tremble at shadows; and we are wretched because poor Fred spends a few shillings on himself."

Then the doctor came, and the topic was necessarily changed.

He planted himself in front of the picture, and began to criticize it.

"I am not really," he said, "a judge of pictures at all. I only pretend to be, like the rest of the world. This, however, seems to me a pretty painting. I never saw a dress like that; but then painters put any dress they like on their models. I never saw a sky like that—'light that never shone on earth or ocean'—but then I never saw lights like those in Turner's pictures. 'So much the worse for you,' Turner used to say, when any one objected to his light that he didn't see the colour. The flowers look faithful, and the leaves seem as if they were shaking in the breeze. How do you make things look as if they were alive? Miss Revel, you are an artist. I am not a critic, and so I can tell the truth. There is genius in the picture. Now let us take it away. I have got the frame ready, and it must go in to-day or to-morrow. As for the face, it's yours, Miss Adie: that is another way of saying that it is so beautiful that no one ever will believe it can be true to life."

"That is right, Dr. Chacomb. Say something more to me, just to put me in a good

humour. I want a little coaxing and petting this morning."

"It's a lovely face, Miss Adie," he went on. "Your sister has caught the laugh in it. That's the prettiest thing of all in your face, that it always seems to laugh. Perhaps it is your eyes that laugh. You ought to be the happiest girl in the world."

"Isn't he delightful, Marion? I know I ought to be, Dr. Chacomb. I've got the 'makings,' as Fred says, of any amount of happiness—tons of happiness; but who could be happy in such a frock as this? And, oh! if you could only see my boots. Now you have said something pleasant to me, go on with Marion's picture."

"Well, then, I have spoken about it to a patient and friend of mine, an R.A., and got you such little influence at work as may be useful when it comes to hanging. I did not say the picture was by a lady, because the R.A.s don't like ladies. Even Ruskin says that women cannot paint. Did you ever hear how a lady first became a student of the Academy? She sent a drawing in under an assumed name; no one knew anything about the artist; it was accepted, made

some noise, and then they found out. But they could not turn it out again, of course. That was some years ago, in the year '60, and plenty of ladies have been admitted since then."

"And you think your friend's interest will help?"

"I hope so. You see, there are so many pictures by Academicians, and so many by well-known men. When these are all provided for, the new and unknown painters have got to take their chance. And for most of them it's a mere toss-up. Some must be taken. Yours is a good deal better than many that are taken; but, pardon me, there are many of the rejected which would show well even by the side of this picture. There, you see, interest comes in."

"And if it is taken?"

"Then it shall be sold; then you will have commissions in plenty; then you shall see your way to a comfortable—perhaps a large—income every year; then, my dear young ladies, you shall say farewell to Lowland-street, and rejoice the world to which you belong."

"Dr. Chacomb," exclaimed Adie, with enthusiasm, "I love you; upon my word, I adore you.

You never come here without raising our spirits and giving us hope. You are not mocking us? You really think that one may reasonably look forward to something this year—say a journey in a van to Epping Forest with the ladies and gentlemen of Elephant-row—they went all together last year, and came home at midnight. Or perhaps one may pray—it's no use praying for anything unless it is reasonably probable—for a new dress for both of us; or what do you say, Marion, to hoping—just tempting Providence by a prayer, you know—that we may see our way to take lodgings where we may behold a field and a tree?"

"Really," said the doctor, "you may hope all these things. And if you will permit me—"

"I will permit you anything, doctor, if Marion's picture gets into the Academy."

"You hear?" And the doctor called Marion to witness. "She permits me anything. That means a visit to the dressmaker's at least."

So he went away, carrying the picture with him.

"My dear," said Adie, "it is such a pity—oh! such a terrible pity!"

"What is a terrible pity?"

"That it cannot be, Marion. The doctor is the best friend we have; and, Marion, he is a friend out of love to you. Do you think he looks for no reward at all?"

They were interrupted again. This time their visitor was a tall, thin man, with stooping shoulders, very long white hair, and a curiously pale face. They had never seen him before, but from Dicky Carew's description they knew their visitor for the famous Hermit of Lowland-street.

They knew him by his tall and stately figure, by his handsome face, by his cold air, and by the studied carelessness of his dress. It was noon, and he was attired in morning costume of the latest fashion. He wore gloves, and had a flower in his button-hole; he carried a new hat, and but for his white, colourless cheek you would have taken him for the freshest importation possible from New Bond-street.

"Pardon me," he said. "I have to ask a thousand pardons for this intrusion. I live over your heads, and it is, perhaps you know, a great many years since I left my rooms. I see no one except my secretary. If I fail in the politeness

due to two most interesting and charming young ladies, you will, I am sure, be good enough to excuse my *gaucherie* on the ground of my recluse habits."

Marion bowed. She took a dislike to the man at once. Adie would perhaps have laughed, but the solemnity of the address overawed her.

"I learned accidentally," he said, looking from one to the other, "that one of the young ladies is an artist."

"I am an artist," said Marion—"or, rather, I try to be an artist."

"Thank you," he said, looking at Adie. "One of the ladies—perhaps both—plays and sings very charmingly."

"My sister," said Marion, "plays and sings so as to charm me, at least. I presume you have overheard her, upstairs. If you will let us know what time will least inconvenience you, we will observe that hour."

He bowed and smiled.

"It is not to speak of your music that I have broken my rule," he said. "I hoped, when I resolved to quit an unworthy world, to make no more acquaintance—never to ask, never to

know, if I could help it, any one's name with whom I might be obliged to converse. I hoped to pass the remainder of my existence in absolute silence and seclusion."

He waited, to let the preamble take effect.

"That must be very disagreeable," said Adie. "I don't wonder at your being tired of it. And all the time you have been locked up, did you have no one to talk to but Mr. Carew?"

"My secretary?" he asked, with a studied elevation of his eyebrow, as if he had only heard his name once or so—everything about this man was false, affected, and *maniéré.* "In fact, I think I have heard that his name is Carew—an old Devonshire name, too; an instance of the many survivals, among the lower classes, of good names."

"Dear me!" said Adie, in her light, frivolous way. She was quietly enjoying the spectacle of this visitor, who was as awkward as an owl in the sunshine. "I should not advise you to tell Mr. Carew that he belongs to the lower classes."

"Adie," said her sister, "we have not learned yet to what we owe this visit."

"Pardon me"—her visitor could not take his

eyes off Adie. "A curious resemblance; the sound of your sister's voice—are you sisters?"

"Yes, we are sisters."

"Ah! it is not with you," he said to Marion, incoherently. "I was struck at first, but that is nothing. I am forced out of my solitude by a pressing want, in which you may help me."

"Do you want to talk to somebody?" asked Adie. "Is it that the unworthy world is actually going to be forgiven?"

The young lady, whose face and voice reminded him of some old acquaintance, and who treated his solemn airs with no more respect than if he had been a quite common creature, disconcerted him hugely.

"Do not speak to me," he replied, "of the world; I hate it—I hate it."

"The world," Adie went on, "is a large ball or sphere, flattened at the poles, something in the shape of an orange. It rotates upon its axis once in every twenty-four hours, and revolves round the sun, which is the centre of the planetary system which we ignorantly call the universe."

"My dear Adie!" Marion cried.

"Geography, my dear Marion—it is so in all the books. The world is a very large thing, and it must be a very big heart to hate it."

"It is not the world I hate." The Hermit swayed himself backwards and forwards with a deprecating gesture. "I hate mankind. I have found men ever cruel, negligent, and unjust. I have met with nothing but selfishness in my communications with men. I have ceased to expect from men anything but slander, obloquy, and treachery."

"That seems very bad," said Adie. "How did men find you?"

He straightened himself, and assumed the most effective pose he knew, his right hand thrust in his waistcoat, like Canning.

"They found ME," he said, "the soul of honour, in things small as well as great; they found ME, a chivalrous gentleman of the old school, one who feared not the face of man, and bowed before the face of woman."

Marion felt inclined to yawn. It was a vulgar and commonplace inclination, but she felt it.

"Pray, sir," she asked, "what can we do for you? You do not know who we are. We

have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. May I ask again why you have called upon us?"

"It is an affair of business," he said, descending to prose. "I want some drawings made from these rough sketches, and I thought that perhaps you might be able to do them for me."

"Let me see them," said Marion.

They were the subjects which Dicky had so often seen commenced and recommenced—drawings in water-colour, in sepia, and in pen-and-ink of garrison scenes, and drawings of camp life.

"You want them copied?" she asked. "But they are finished sketches already, and so much better than I can do myself."

"I want you to make an oil painting of one," he said. "Choose which you think best."

She laid one aside—a simple drawing of a single figure emerging from a tent, in ice and snow, looking with a wild expression of terror as he buckled on his sword.

"That is a curious subject; shall I take that?"

He snatched it from her.

"No. I did not know it was there. I will choose one for you."

He took a drawing full of life, energy, and verve, representing a garrison steeplechase.

"Yes, I can do this; but you have got the same face in the central figure."

She looked at the first, and then at her patron.

The face was the same; but it was his face—his own face. She saw that in a minute, in spite of the change which twenty years had brought to a face once gallant and gay, and still handsome.

He passed over the remark in silence.

"If you will kindly," he said, with a resumption of his cold politeness—"if you will kindly attempt a reproduction, a *pasticcio*, of this little unpretending sketch, I shall be happy indeed. I am so selfish"—he turned to Adie—"that I shall try to make your charming sister the accomplice in these innocent pleasures of mine. If I could, by any persuasion, enlist you in the same cause—"

She shook her head.

"I assure you," she said, "I do not paint at all; and none of my pleasures are innocent—not dove-like, that is, like your own."

"I mean," he replied, "that if you would sometimes condescend to visit the cell of a Soli-

tary, you might cheer the hours of retirement with the sweetness of your voice. Saul, you know, had David."

"Yes," said Marion, "and threw his javelin at him. My sister, Mr. Lilliecrip—I think that is your name—cannot pay visits to your rooms, nor can I."

"Pardon me again." He smiled, so as to lay bare a whole row of white teeth. "I find that I am more spoiled for society than I had anticipated. I should have known that my invitation was contrary to the *convenances*. Pray forgive me. Only, perhaps, you will not allow my rudeness to interfere with your usual practice on the piano. Let me, at least, have the pleasure of hearing you play and sing, as you have been accustomed to do."

"If you want society," said Adie, in her *naïve* manner, "I don't see why you are a Hermit. If you remain a Hermit, that must be because you do not care for society. If you want cheering up, why not go back to the men you have found so very, very wicked?"

"I hate society," said the Solitary.

"Adie, dear, we have no excuse for asking

this gentleman anything about his private affairs. I will try to copy your picture for you, sir, and I hope you will be satisfied with the result; but I do not promise much."

"I will come down, if I may be allowed, from time to time, to advise in its progress," he replied. "Tell me if I may be permitted to intrude upon this sweet solitude, the abode of the twin muses, the sisters of singing and painting, Euterpe and Poly—Polyhymnia, I think, unless it was Proserpine; but my classical memory is weak."

Marion was annoyed at the man's florid language.

"You may come," she said, shortly. "Indeed, you have a right. Good morning, sir."

"Marion," said Adie, when his step was well up the stairs, "this is a day out of an Arabian Night. Isn't he too funny?"

"Do not let him come here when I am out," said Marion. "Promise me not to go up to his rooms, or to talk to him. I don't like the man."

They heard, presently, his footsteps over their heads, walking backwards and forwards.

The Hermit was in a fever. He had actually

seen and talked to two young ladies, after fourteen years of incarceration. He was worse than Simon Stylites, who could at least, if he wished, wink at his fair devotees; he had not even that consolation. He read perpetually his yellow French novels of intrigue, and fed his mind upon the distorted unrealities of the Second Empire. But here was reality; and he trembled now that he met it.

"They are perfectly delicious," he said. "As for the younger, I seem to have met her before, somewhere—who is she like? But the elder girl, with her deep eyes— Ah! if I could win her, I would—yes, I would give up even my Hermitage, and go back to—to"—he shuddered—"to some part of the world where no one would know anything about me."

In his nervousness, he had left all his sketches with Marion.

CHAPTER IV.

ADIE left Marion over the sketches, and sought the society of Mr. Owen. It was a half-holiday, and she knew that she should find the schoolmaster alone in the deserted school-room.

There, in fact, he was. The sun, shining through the open windows, made the empty desks and deserted benches look bright and pleasant. He was sitting at his desk, ensconced comfortably for the afternoon with Langhorne's "Plutarch," but he did not look sorry to be disturbed by the girl who so often came down to talk with him. Plutarch, no doubt an incomparable author, has no chance, even with an old schoolmaster versed in the wisdom of the book of Proverbs, against the voice and eyes of a pretty girl. The life of Aristides, and

the comparison between him and Cato, are most improving studies; but even to an instructor of youth it is more cheerful to read a page of life.

Therefore Mr. Owen gave his visitor the one chair in the room, and sat himself down, with crossed legs, on a bench before her. With his matted hair, his seamy and wrinkled face, his spectacles, and the tips of his short fingers touching each other, he looked the very effigy of wisdom. The owl-faced goddess whom Dr. Schliemann found at Troy was not more sagacious of aspect.

"And so, Miss Adie, you want my advice about work, do you? Sit down, and let me think."

"If I could find anything that I could do; but, Mr. Owen, I am so lamentably ignorant. I know French, to be sure, and I can play and sing a little; but that is all. As for history, I assure you I hardly know Alexander the Great from the Great Mogul."

"That's because you don't read Plutarch," said the schoolmaster.

"And my geography is worse. I really should

not know whether the map of America was upside down or not, it is so long since I looked at it."

"There is no upside or downside either to a map. I caned a boy to-day for not knowing the frontiers of China. To be sure, I did not know them myself."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself for caning the poor boy, Mr. Owen," said Adie.

"It is the duty of the boy to know his lessons, and the duty of the master to awaken his instincts. It is for example, 'Smite the scorner, and the simple shall beware.' The only way to do that is by caning him. Draco, you will find, in Plutarch's Life of Solon, punished everything by death, 'because,' he said, 'the smallest offences deserve death, and there is no greater punishment for the most heinous.' As for the schoolmaster not knowing everything, it is, as everybody knows, a part of his professional baggage to pretend to know everything. My dear, if the boys, who are demoniac by nature, found out a weak point in my knowledge, I should lose my authority over them. Just look at the range of subjects: Latin and trigonometry; French

and writing; book-keeping by double entry and geography; chemistry, so as to march with the age—bless you, a schoolmaster is nowhere who does not march with the age—Euclid, algebra, and history; the Bible! The wonder is, that the brain stands it all. But it isn't the amount of knowledge, my dear, that makes a good schoolmaster feel like going cracked, but the amount of pretension. Well, we are as honest as we can afford."

"I do not want to teach," said Adie—"I am far too stupid and too impatient. But there are other ways."

"There are," he said, "fifty other ways. Wait here, and look at Plutarch, while I go and get a little book of notes. I made it up two or three years ago, when Winifred was casting about for a profession. Sometimes I have thought about sending it to the papers. You shall hear.

"Now"—he returned with a penny note-book, filled with figures and references—"I am not going to read you all this, but only a part. Listen! Axiom First. I've ruled it all out, like Euclid, in axioms, definitions, and propositions.

Axiom the First—you will have to grant this—'No woman wants to work.'"

"Granted," said Adie. That's true, I suppose; nor any man either."

"No; that is the great difference between the sexes. Man does like work, and woman does not. She likes to sit in warm corners, and talk. Axiom One's allowed. Axiom Two: 'If a woman is obliged to work, she likes to work as little as possible.'"

"Of course."

"Axiom Three: 'She likes to get as much money as she can, and to be her own mistress.'"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"We are getting on capitally. Axiom Four: 'A woman ought to get the just price of her labour.'"

"Of course she ought."

"She grants everything, this young lady does," said the philosopher. "She's got a brain fit for Euclid himself. Axiom Five: 'There ought to be no difference, provided the work is the same, between the wages of women and those of men.' That granted too? Very well. We are getting on famously. These are the introductions to a

great science; but as yet I've only had time to work out one or two propositions. What a discoverer I might have been, if I'd only had the time to work for myself! Fancy reducing all social distinctions to theorems, like Euclid, only more interesting. First Proposition—this is a startler: 'All employers of women ought immediately to be hanged by the neck.'"

"Oh, what a dreadful proposition!"

Adie took the word in its usual, not its Euclidean sense, and understood Mr. Owen to mean that he wished to introduce a Bill into the Legislature for the sole purpose of instantly destroying this large and influential class.

"Immediately," he repeated; "without trial, without jury, without counsel—all on one rope; and I would pull at the other end."

"Mr. Owen!"—for he looked quite flushed and excited, and began to stump up and down the school-room, jerking about his short legs in a really alarming manner.

"Second Proposition: 'No woman ought to be allowed to work for money.'"

"But if they must?"

"Let me say my say, and then you shall talk.

There are three millions of women earning wages. Sixty thousand are milliners. Stay, let me read my list."

He found the place in his book, and read:

"'Milliners, 58,460; shirtmakers, 26,875; machinists, 10,724; bookbinders, 5,272; florists, 4,260.' But the list only accounts for 105,691; and I forget now whether it extends beyond London. Besides these, there are bead-makers, lace-makers, bonnet-makers, book-folders, boot-closers, factory girls, shop girls, bandbox-makers, match-makers, nurses, cigar-makers, and thousands of other trades. Now, how do they get paid? Don't answer me."

He stopped, and tapped his forehead, in reflection.

"Third Proposition: 'It ought to be penal to make or take contracts. Penal, Miss Adie--imprisonment for life, without hope of commutation.

"Now, for money. My Winifred is in a service—a Government service—where they pay the men better than the women for the same work. However, she is quick—bless her little fingers! —and gets a guinea a-week. But you would not like to be a telegraph girl?"

"I do not know what I should like, I am sure."

"Dressmaking. That is almost the worst line of any. If you live in the house you get two or three shillings a week, and your food; if you live out, you get fifteen shillings and no food. Fifteen shillings! Think of that, and in London, where even the worst room cannot be got under five shillings. Say two girls live in it together, for economy; there is half-a-crown for rent. Eating and drinking cannot be got under eighteenpence a day, because the poor creatures are unable to buy and cook their own food, but must give a profit to eating-houses; that leaves exactly two shillings a week—five pounds a-year—for keeping up a respectable appearance, and dressing as the poor things must dress. Why, no servant in the country, no poor lodging-house maid of all-work, is paid so badly. My dear, try to think what the girls do. They work for twelve hours a day, and sometimes more. When the season is over they are turned off. Of course, they have no share in the profits, although the success of the firm depends on their needles. What right—what right, I

say, have the masters to the great fortunes they make out of the girls? The fine ladies never think; and when the girls go wrong—but there, never mind.

"Day workers, again. They make eighteenpence a day—nine shillings in all. Worse off than the poor creatures in the shops.

"Shop attendants. Do you know that they make them wear black silks, and stop the money out of their pay?

"Florists. Do you know that they have to work from five in the morning till eight, nine, and ten at night?

"Barmaids. They are kept in the house on the condition that they attract gentlemen—paid for degradation.

"Cigar-makers. They make cigars faster and better than men. They are paid forty per cent. less than men.

"And listen to this. Woman's skilled labour is worth sixteen shillings a week at the outside; man's unskilled labour is worth eighteen shillings a week as a minimum. There is not a man in this country—not a single stupid, illiterate lout—who, at the ordinary rates of pay, cannot, by

fetching and carrying, earn more than a woman skilled in a mechanical trade.

"There's a lower depth still, my dear—a lower depth, for which a judgment ought to fall upon this country, and it will. It's the Government contracts. They contract for what they ought to make themselves; they pay the middle-man, to save themselves the trouble of preventing themselves from being cheated; they pay a price which they know to be inadequate, and they look on while the contractor grinds the face of the poor to fulfil his bond. Because, my dear, he will have his profit, that is quite certain; and unless he can cheat the Government, he will starve his labourer. There are thousands of women in this country doing Government work, for contractors to make their fortune; and no one to lift up a hand, and ask that labour for the nation shall be paid a fair and honest price. A woman working a machine for an army contract, for twelve hours a day—think of working a machine twelve hours!—can earn two shillings and twopence-halfpenny a day; and that less stoppages, if the foreman has a spite. Six times twelve are seventy-two—se-

venty-two hours a week for thirteen shillings and sixpence! Most of them widows, too, with families of children. There are nearly a million of widows in this country, and more than half are earning their own living.

"There's philanthropists, now—they talk of teaching women trades; but why, my dear, why? To get their labour cheaper, and make the middle-man richer. If philanthropists wanted to help, they would teach the women to form trades unions."

All this time, Mr. Owen was walking up and down the room, faster and faster, growing every moment the more energetic as he denounced the oppressors of womankind.

"They are all in league together, I tell you. Woman is to be the beast of burden because she is the weaker vessel. We are no better than Australian savages. We treat our women as they treat theirs—make them do the hardest work, and take the best pay and the best food for themselves. My dear Miss Adie, it's shameful, it's intolerable, it's horrible. If I could make them understand—I mean the fine ladies—the evils they cause by their apathy, not only

to the poor women with whom they have no sympathy, but with the women of their own class, for whom they make the path of sin easy. But there, you don't understand. How should you?"

"I understand, at least, that women are very badly treated. But you have not told me of anything that could help me. What are girls like myself to do, Mr. Owen?"

"God knows!" he replied, shaking his head. "The Lord only knows what young ladies find to do who have been brought up to nothing. Some of them go out for governesses—keeping a governess is the modern way of pretending to educate the girls as well as the boys, for a tenth part of the cost; but the examinations all over the country are making it more and more difficult to find good places, except for girls who have taken degrees. Some of them try law-copying, another name for slow starvation; some of them make pretty, useless things, and send them to places where they pretend to sell ladies' work. Nobody ever buys anything there, and after a bit the things come back again, spoiled by being knocked about a shop."

"The world seems a much more wicked place than I ever thought it," said Adie.

"It is, young lady—it is a great deal more wicked than any one ever thought it. It is so wicked, that the heart of man cannot conceive its wickedness. There is so much misery in it, that no one would dare to write it down; there is so much wrong wanting to be set right, that no one dares stir a finger for fear of disturbing everything. In this country we sit and wait, hoping that no one will trouble us; and one day we shall see some noisy demagogue go up and down the face of the country, raising such a storm as England has never seen, for his own selfish and miserable ends."

"Don't frighten me, Mr. Owen," said Adie, really frightened at the passion which the schoolmaster threw into his words. "Tell me, is there nothing at all for me to do?"

"Some young ladies take to art, like your dear sister, but they are few; some try writing, but not one in a thousand makes anything at that; some go on the stage, but there are not many young ladies on the stage—more's the pity for the theatre; one or two have taken to

lecturing, and that's the worst line of anything else in the world. The history of woman's work, Miss Adie, is what I have told you in my axioms. Women don't want any work to do; they have not been trained to it; they are not accustomed to unite for purposes of self-protection; they are the victims of every dirty-souled draper and man-milliner who is content to get rich on the profits made by starving his work girls. Proposition One, first class, first boy—boy—I beg your pardon—Miss Adie Revel, what is Proposition One?"

"Every employer of women, including the Government, ought to be hanged immediately."

"Prove that proposition, first—young lady of the first class."

"Women are cheated out of their proper pay; skilled women do not receive wages at the same rate as skilled men, and they have to work too many hours. Men who oppress them ought to be punished. The best punishment is caning—"

"First boy, take care."

"I mean, hanging. You wouldn't cane me, Mr. Owen, would you?"

"Finish the proposition first."

"Well, it is finished, isn't it? So that they all ought to be hanged."

"*Quod erat demonstrandum.*"

"Say that in English, Mr. Owen."

"*Quod*, which—the pronoun; *erat*, was—verb, imperfect; *sum, fui, esse—demonstrandum*, gerund in *di-do-dum*, to be demonstrated. First boy, go up a place. Now the Second Proposition."

"'No woman ought to be allowed to work for money.' But I cannot prove that. It seems to me that women ought to be allowed to work for as much as they can get."

"I want to see women working at things which do not bring in money," he explained. "And why? Because there are plenty of men in the world to do the useful things. When these come to be too few, we shall invent more machines. If women were prohibited from getting their own living, the men would have to do all the nasty jobs that they have put on the women —boot-work and the like. Boys could do the things which require lightness of touch, and do them quite as well, too, as women."

"But you would not let the poor women starve, would you?"

"No; the State should keep them, and keep them in comfort. Ah, it's a *pons asinorum* in my new Euclid that women ought not to be allowed to work for money; but it's coming round to it by degrees. We don't like to see our women cultivating the fields, as I'm told they do in France. Soon we shall come not to like to see them at hard work of any kind; and then the man who is found guilty of ill-treating his girls will have a bad time of it. Why, I heard the other day of a woman employed in a white-lead factory, who had to walk four miles to her work and four miles back, work ten hours, and earn nine shillings a-week. Her employer was a gentleman, of course—they all are. My reform will sweep all such gentlemen off the face of the earth. Now, first class, attention: Proposition Three."

"'It ought to be penal to make or take contracts.' Come, I know all the beginning, Mr. Owen."

"Prove it, first boy."

"I can't, please, my master."

"First boy, you will have to go to the bottom of the class. Listen. When a contract is made,

the maker secures his own profit first; when he has to make a lower offer, he sticks to his own profit, and screws the loss out of his *employés* if he can. When coal went up fifty per cent, the miners would have got nothing; only they showed a bold front, so they got ten per cent. When coal went down, the men got locked out till they agreed to a reduction of fifteen per cent. Who wins by that? The masters, whichever way the wind blows. The women cannot unite, because no one has taught them how; and so they suffer by every contract that is made, and you can't prevent it."

"I don't quite understand, and I think I have had enough of trading for one day. But, Mr. Owen, you have not answered my question. Tell me what I can do to earn some money."

The old schoolmaster took the girl by both her hands, and looked in her face. It was a face so pretty, and yet, somehow, so helpless. In every feature it spoke of a want of support.

"My child, you have got, or your sister has got, a little money. She has her art, she has health and strength; pray God that you may have to do—nothing. And believe me, it is the

happiest condition for all women on this earth to do nothing. Stay at home, my dear, and nourish high and noble thoughts; keep up your courage, and trust in God."

He led his pupil to the door with the gallantry of a Castilian, and dismissed her; but the talk had revived old thoughts in his brain, and ideas that he had long since abandoned as impracticable and useless. He sat down and tried to read Plutarch with his usual calm, but in vain. The beloved pages of Langhorne had no charm for him. He put the book down, and began to pace up and down the school-room, working out one more of those golden dreams of an impossible future which, while they last, make a man divine.

"I see," he might have said, had his vision shaped itself into words, "I see a time when men shall acknowledge that the truest chance for the world is to cultivate and raise the women. They shall form associations which shall enable girls to work, if they must work, for their own profit. Rich people shall help the girls to found their own co-operative workshops. The minimum of pay for work done shall be regulated.

They shall have the boy and girl put on an equal footing at school; the maid and the youth on an equal footing at starting in the world; and the only superiority shall belong to the married man who has his family to support. The family shall still be everything; but the woman's place in the social circle shall be sacred. Somehow or other, rich women will understand then that their own luxury, their vanities and indulgences, have done more than anything in the world to retard the progress of their sex; they will see that these are the chief means by which the lower class of women is kept down, and the sex is put to rebuke through the temptations of which the pure and virtuous are the principal cause.

"It is a curious world," he said, waking from this foolish dream—"it is a curious and a wicked world. When our Lord said, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' and when He bade the guiltless one to throw the first stone, He meant more than the people understood. We can none of us separate ourselves from the sins of the world. We all help to cause them. The purest young lady helps when she goes to the shop of the

man in Regent-street who starves his work-girls on fifteen shillings a week. We help by what we say and by what we do. We are all entangled in a mesh and network of wickedness. We are none of us better, one than the other. And last night I was hard in my thoughts about Fred Revel. Lord be merciful to me a sinner!

"Solomon says that the labour of the righteous tendeth to life. Did he ever know of shirt-makers and machinists getting three farthings a shirt, and having to find their own cotton? I doubt it's a more complicated world since his time—eh? We want a new King Solomon. There's comfort in Proverbs, and there's a verse for nearly everything; but sometimes it breaks down. To be sure, we are never told that Solomon was a prophet. He hadn't the gift of seeing the grinders of women's labour in the future. And after all"—his face brightened up—"there's something: 'He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.' Aha! Solomon is always there."

CHAPTER V.

MARION turned idly over the sketches her new patron had left with her. There were some fifty or more water-colours, executed with great power of drawing and considerable feeling for colour. But they were nearly all alike. They represented the Hermit in his youth—the likeness was quite unmistakable—in various scenes connected with the army. He was riding a race; he was presiding at a convivial gathering; he was acting on a stage; he was dancing; he was fighting; but none of the portraits seemed so exactly characteristic as the one which he had snatched from her hand, showing himself—his own actual face—wild with terror amid those dismal surroundings of cold, misery, and death. Why should a man paint himself deliberately as a coward?

Men, however, as Marion might have known, do reveal their own natures who get to giving secrets to paper. There was a murderer, some time ago, who came home after perpetrating the deed, and wrote on a slip of paper, by way of rough note for after-entry in a diary, a memorial of his own crime: "Fine and hot; killed a little girl"—a circumstance which, if I remember right, so far prejudiced the mob against him, that they wished then and there to rend him into small pieces. But Marion was no psychologist; she had never learned to reason and to analyze, as lawyers say—which is, being interpreted into English, to impute the worst motives, and then to try and prove them. Therefore, she wondered.

Presently, turning over the drawings, she came to a head. There was nothing very much, artistically speaking, to attract her attention. The head was dressed in the fashion of hair common twenty-five years ago—not a very pretty fashion. It was not well painted—not nearly so well as the later sketches. But Marion looked at it with an astonishment which took away her breath.

For it was the head of her sister. The same graceful pose, the same careless parting of the lips, the same contour, the same eyes. Only the chin and the shape of the head were a little different. How could the Hermit have got Adie's face to draw?

And then she dropped the picture with a sinking heart. It was not the portrait of Adie, but it *was* the portrait of—Mrs. Spenser. Haggard, worn, and wasted as the woman was now, she yet preserved a likeness to her youth; and here it was. Marion tied it up in paper, for fear her sister might find it, and began to think.

The man, whoever he was, must have known Mrs. Spenser. But when? and under what circumstances?

"It cannot be," she said—"he must have seen Adie on the stairs or somewhere, and drawn her."

And this, again, was impossible; because Adie's head was never dressed like the hair in this picture.

She took it out and looked at it again.

Then she put it back, with a prayer that, if the man had known Mrs. Spenser, he might never

be moved to speak of her. And she resolved to have as few dealings with him as possible.

But the accident, which might mean nothing, made her as uneasy as Robinson Crusoe when he spied the single unaccompanied bare foot-print on the sands—surely the finest incident that ever occurred to any novelist.

She began her copying work, Adie being, as we have seen, in conversation with Mr. Owen.

Presently Dr. Chacomb came back to her, beaming.

"I have shown your picture to my patient," he said, "and I think I may congratulate you. He likes it. I will not tell you all the flattering things he said of you or of it; nor the faults he found in it. But you may be certain that it will be taken, and nearly certain that it will be sold. Are you satisfied?"

"More than satisfied," said Marion.

"I have bought you some flowers in Covent-garden on my way—quite the simplest wild flowers. Here is a rosebud. It must be a Devonshire nosegay. When shall we get back the roses to *your* cheek, Marion?"

Sometimes he called her by her Christian

name, and there was a lowering in the man's voice, as if he was stepping down from some imaginary platform of pretension. To the world he was loud-voiced, self-reliant, and ready to advance to the front.

"The flowers are beautiful"—Marion evaded the question of her own cheeks—"and we are very much obliged to you, Dr. Chacomb, for that and everything else."

"May I sit down and talk for five minutes, before I visit my gouty patients? They are all swearing in chorus at every moment's delay."

"Then go at once, Dr. Chacomb, and relieve the poor people."

"In five minutes. Let me have a little five minutes. The atmosphere of this room is a rest to me. One is out of the world here, looking at you quietly painting."

Marion began to feel afraid, and looked it.

"I am not going to make love to you," said Joseph Chacomb. "I like to be with you. So long as you know that I love you, that is enough. Do you think a woman ever understands her own power over a man?"

"I never thought about it."

"You make me young again. All the old feelings that I had forgotten come back to me. That is it, Marion. You freshen up my withered old heart as—what is it the Psalmist says?—the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty wilderness. You are the shadow, and my life is the thirsty wilderness. But with you all the old thoughts come back, just as if I were a boy again, singing in the choir of the parish church, only with a little more vigour."

"But how can I do all that?"

"I do not know. It is so. Those worst parts of life, which the moralist is always lamenting, one, after all, Marion, very easily forgets. I have been worse than most men, I suppose, because I kept it up till forty-five, and the average run of men knock off at thirty. I had a rackety time for five and twenty years. London, Paris, and Vienna taught me pretty well all there was to learn; and I think I started in practice with as extended a knowledge of human nature as most young physicians."

"If you are sorry for what is past, is it not better to think no more of it?"

"But I'm not sorry, you see. I enjoyed the

whole run. Hang it, I enjoy everything! I like my present life; I like pocketing fees, and going about in a carriage to see rich patients. But I sometimes think I liked the old life better, when I made a precarious living, and chiefly by borrowing from Chauncey Chacomb. It's a very pleasant thing to sit among a lot of good fellows, and talk all night. There's an excitement about letting the morrow take care of itself. It is delightful to be out of society, and to please yourself what you do and how you live. There is a freedom, too, about the city of Prague which you cannot get anywhere else."

"What is the city of Prague?"

"It is the capital of Bohemia."

"Then you are not sorry, after all, for wasting so many years?"

"Yes, I am. I am confoundedly sorry. Only I liked the time. If it was not for that, I should not be afraid of meeting old friends, who might remind one of disagreeable things. And I dare say I might be able to repent now, which I cannot, just when I can afford it for the first time in my life."

It was not quite the repentance that Marion might have wished, but she let that pass.

"Then there is the third kind of life," he said, "and that is what I want to lead with you."

"The five minutes are exceeded, Dr. Chacomb," said Marion. "Good-bye."

"I had a letter from Mrs. Chauncey Chacomb the second to-day. She tells me your brother has written for money, and she has answered the letter. I hope it was not a rude and vulgar answer."

"Fred ought not to have written. There is the answer."

"I shall see her on Saturday. You shall never have such a letter as this again. Chauncey wants to do what he can for your brother, and smuggled a letter to me. What can he do?"

"Nothing," said Marion, shortly. "We want no help from your cousin."

She knew that Chauncey Chacomb was a prey to hallucination; but she could not bear that they should turn to him for help in any, even the direst, necessity. It was enough for her to know that Chauncey bore her father an insane and meaningless hatred.

The doctor had spoken of meeting old acquaintances. On the stairs he found himself face to face with a gentleman who had red hair, and plenty of it, a red face, and very seedy attire. Dr. Chacomb changed colour, and drew himself up to let the other pass.

"Hallo! Joe—Dr. Chacomb. Who the deuce would have thought of finding you here?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr.—Mr.—"

"As if you didn't know me—Dicky Carew. And what a swell you are, Joe! What are you up to now? Is it true that you've come out strong in the pill and powder line, and cut your old friends?"

"I have business of importance, Mr. Carew, and must wish you good morning. Have the goodness to address me in future by my surname."

"I will, Joe—I will. I always do, in fact, when an old pal has got up in the world. Not that you and I were ever exactly pals in the strict sense of the word. I don't think, for instance, that I owe you any money. But you *have* been seen at our nightly free and easy, Joe—I mean Dr. Chacomb—haven't you?"

The doctor tried to push past him, but his old friend stood on the stairs facing him, with one arm laid on the stair rail and the other propped against the wall, so that it was impossible to get by without using violence; and Dicky looked so genial, so glad to see him, that Joseph Chacomb became Joe again.

"Come, Dicky," he said, "I am not best pleased to meet you, because I am out of the old set now, and cannot be as I was before. You understand that, perfectly?"

"Lord bless you!—yes. I understood it in a minute. Can you, in those togs, be a pal of mine, while I am in these? Not to be thought of, Joe—I mean Dr. Chacomb. And so you've got on in the world—that's quite clear. Pride, nowadays, instead of going before a fall, comes after a rise. When I rise, Dr. Chacomb, we will be haughty together."

"I am doing very well. And you?"

"Life with me," said Dicky, "is stationary. The stream of Time flows on without stopping, but brings no change to me. Perhaps, some day, the world will be sorry to think—"

"What are you doing now? Are you on any good paper?"

"On two admirable papers, if they only paid better; and in a Hermit's good graces, if only he valued my services higher. Doing pretty well, Dr. Chacomb; rising steadily, I think."

"Let me look at you," said the doctor. "Ah, I see. The old story, Dicky. I see it in your eyes and in your cheeks; it's telling on your nerves. Knock it off. Good morning."

"Yes, Joe," said Dicky, trying to intercept him, "I will consider your advice, which I am sure is based upon the soundest—"

"Good morning, Mr. Carew," said the doctor, pushing past.

"One moment, Dr. Chacomb—one word only. At this juncture, owing to my aunt in Cumberland not having remitted me my rents, my editor being away on a holiday, and my publishers being, like myself, in temporary embarrassment, I should be very much obliged if you would lend me half a sovereign. The money shall be repaid on Saturday morning, at half-past ten punctually, and at any spot that shall be most convenient to you to meet me."

The doctor produced the coin, and handed it to Dicky, who, directly he touched it, sprang up the steps rapidly.

Seeing Miss Revel's door open, he looked in.

"Good morning, Miss Revel," he whispered, with a face like the morning sun for redness and for smiles.

"Is that you, Mr. Carew? Are you going upstairs?"

"Yes. Are you quite well, Miss Revel? Ah! And Miss Adie quite well, too? Ah!"

Then he went a few steps higher up.

He stopped, for a thought struck him.

He turned round, and began to slowly descend the stairs.

Then he sped swiftly, so as to give reflection no chance, for the nearest public-house.

"I know it is bad for me," he said, with the glass in his hand; "but it doesn't do to be always thinking of oneself—it isn't Christian."

CHAPTER VI.

FLUSHED mentally and facially with the effects of this self-denial extraordinary, Dicky Carew mounted the steps which led to his employer's rooms three at a time. He did not observe at first—being a little late, and perhaps on that account anxious to begin work without any preliminary remarks—a singular change in his patron's appearance. When, however, he was seated, and ventured to look up, he was astonished. The Hermit had exchanged his long Cashmere dressing gown—which gave him, owing to his great height and thin figure, something the air of a jointed telegraph post—for a new and fashionably cut walking coat, designed for a man of five and twenty. He had reduced his white hair to a more practicable length, trimmed his

white moustache after the fashion of the modern youth, wore a pair of pearl-grey trousers, and a flower in his button-hole. In fact, he had postponed the morning interview with the secretary in order to call upon his fellow-lodgers. Dicky, beside this elderly dandy, looked almost supernaturally shabby. The Recluse was standing before the glass, still adjusting and trimming, with the air of a *petit crêvé*. Somehow, too—was it the effect of a little rouge?—his cheeks, contrary to their wont, seemed to have upon them a faint tinge of colour, a delicate bloom, very pretty to look at. By craft and mysterious art, known only to himself, this lonely dweller in a cave had made himself look some twenty years younger. He might now have passed for a man of thirty-five to forty, prematurely grey.

"I am here, sir," said Dicky, taking up his pen and adjusting his pad.

It was then that he looked up and observed the remarkable change in his employer's costume.

Mr. Lilliecrip grunted, and tied his neck ribbon again, catching the full effect of the light upon the downward stroke of the right hand end.

"Hold your tongue," he added, tearing off the

tie in a rage, and taking another from a box. "You have interrupted me in an inspiration which may never come again. How dare you speak unless you are spoken to?"

The inspiration referred to his tie: his secretary understood him to allude to something about George the Fourth, the Prince Consort, Washington, or Tippoo Sahib—all of whom seemed somehow mixed up together in those extraordinary memoirs.

Dicky waited submissively, only letting his imagination loose on that little drama of revenge of which I have already spoken. This old buck—this elderly Hermit, dressing himself in the glass to gratify a perfectly meaningless vanity—how if he had him at his mercy!

"Had it been myself," thought the secretary, "dressing to partake of the buxom, the ripe, the juicy Medlar hospitality, or to escort Ready Vyvyan—I know she loves me, poor little Popsy—to the theatre; or going to meet Winifred Owen on her way from the telegraph, like Fred Revel; or to take Miss Marion Revel—the angel—out for a walk, if she'd let me, which she never would, it would be a different thing.

There might be some sense in *my* wearing pearl-grey trousers, a lemon-coloured waistcoat, diamond studs, and a flower in my button-hole. But for an elderly Hermit, for a miserable Solitary—pah! it's disgusting; it makes one sick. I should like to spoil his beauty for a week."

"Tell me, sir," said Mr. Lilliecrip, turning to him with an imperative air—"tell me if this necktie sits properly. What do you think of the angle? Does it not rather spoil the perfect regularity of outline of the features? Give me your opinion, if you are capable of having one on so important a matter as dress."

"I am not a valet," said Dicky, sulkily.

"I forgot—no. You are one of those failures of civilization called a copying clerk. Not a valet—no. Beau Brummell once told me—"

"Were you his valet?" Dicky asked, with a fierceness which surprised Mr. Lilliecrip, who made no answer, but proceeded with his tie. At length it was finished.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Lilliecrip, in his coldest voice—"now, sir, you are late again. I have warned you already, mind."

The beer was up in Dicky's brain by this

time, and he felt, with a glow of self-respect, that Mr. Lilliecrip had really better not go too far. When the humblest worm has had two glasses of beer in the morning, over and above its usual quantity, that worm will turn and present a warlike front. Under ordinary circumstances, it is a mistake to suppose that a perfectly sober worm will ever turn. In this case, Dicky was emboldened by the success of his remark.

"I am ready," he repeated, doggedly. "Go on; go on, Beau Brummell."

"Where did I leave off yesterday?"

"I forget," said the scribe, with a laugh. "I think you were dining with William the Conqueror, after you vanquished Henry the Eighth at Waterloo."

Mr. Lilliecrip looked daggers, but answered nothing. Dicky noticed, however, that his hand trembled, and nerved himself for war.

The Recluse took up a paper, and read it over.

"You have spelt developed, Mr. Carew, with two *p's*. That is the French way. I thought you were totally ignorant of French. I see, by the way, that you are: Fouché appears on the next page with the wrong accent. So that you

are unacquainted—I mean only partially acquainted—with English. Of course, in a tenth-rate literary hack one does not expect much; but surely, in the intervals of penny-a-lining and drinking at public-house bars, some of the imperfections of an early education might be repaired by the help of a little industry."

If he had accused him of shabbiness, of intemperate habits, of extravagance, of unpunctuality, of any ordinary small sins, he would have borne it patiently. But to be accused of an illiterate education, it was too much. The lightning played round Dicky's eyes, and for a moment he was like Achilles resenting the insults of Agamemnon. Aided, perhaps, like that illustrious hero, by the goddess, he repressed his wrath, and answered with a mildness like the thyrsus of Bacchus, because it concealed a sharp point—

"In which paper did I spell the word wrongly? Was it the one where you described the only time you ever went to the theatre with Walter Tyrrell, the murderer of William Rufus; or the occasion on which you were invited by Richard the Second to meet Sir William Walworth at a State dinner in the Tower?"

Nothing could justify this speech, not even that second visit to the house of call. Still Dicky felt, though the glove was in a manner thrown down, that such an extemporaneous plunge into English history reflected the greatest credit upon him. He wagged his head as if more might come, and took up his pen again.

"I am ready, sir," he repeated, in his mildest manner. "Pray go on."

Uneducated! imperfections of an early education! He, who had been captain of Biddlecombe Grammar School, and afterwards assistant master at a commercial academy at Exeter, until an unpleasantness connected with the master's daughter, needless to relate, had driven him forth, and sent him to seek his fortune in London! Imperfections of an early education! Dicky's feelings were cruelly outraged; but he repressed himself, and repeated, calmly—

"I am ready, sir."

Mr. Lilliecrip, who had seated himself opposite his secretary, looked at him curiously and nervously. The offensive remarks addressed to him in reference to early kings of English history appeared, however, to produce no effect,

after the first shock, upon his calm and cold air. On the contrary, they made him look colder of aspect. He waited a little, and then went on, as if nothing had happened—

"'At one of the Chiswick parties, it matters little in what year, I had the pleasure of meeting Talleyrand.' Have you taken that down, Mr. Carew? There are two *l's* in Talleyrand."

"'I had the pleasure of meeting Cardinal Wolsey,'" said the secretary.

Really, some fate was possessing Richard. *Raro antecedentem*—his sin was finding him out. It was all that fatal second glass of beer.

"Talleyrand," repeated Mr. Lilliecrip, mildly. "'The diplomatist, although then considerably advanced in years, was in his best spirits, and said some of his happiest things. Among others that I remember—"

"Remember!" echoed Dicky. "Ho! ho! ho!"

Not a loud laugh, but an offensively quiet one, as if the producer was enjoying a joke all to himself.

Mr. Lilliecrip took no kind of notice.

"'Among other things that I remember was a reply he made to a young nobleman of ducal

rank, who wished to silence the talk of certain lacqueys. 'Young man,' he said, 'let us listen to your betters.'"

"Capital," said Dicky. "Have you forgotten the rest of the story?"

"Sir?"

The voice was as cold as steel; but Dicky was protected with the armour which goes with Dutch courage, and felt it not.

"I always want to write down the end of your stories," he said. "Did the noble entertainer at Chiswick kick out Cardinal Wolsey — I mean Talleyrand? or did the noble scion of a ducal house kick him out? And what view did Henry the Eighth take of it? Were you beheaded on Tower-hill for laughing at the Cardinal's impudence?"

"When you have finished your morning's work, sir, we shall exchange a few words."

"I am ready, sir," said Dicky, again with the look of humility. Only he spoiled his submission by a chuckle, and a soft "Ho! ho! ho! Henry the Eighth!"

"'It is not generally known that the way to eat asparagus'—there is only one *r* and no *h* in

that word, Mr. Carew—'was for a long time the subject of much social discussion. I once dined with Queen Adelaide, after she became a widow, in private. There was no other guest, and she was good enough to give me her views on this important point. 'I tell you,' she said, 'because I am glad to interchange thoughts with a man like yourself, who has made all the minutiæ of social life the subject of his profound study.'"

"Did she say all that?" asked Dicky. "Oh, oh!"

Mr. Lilliecrip pursued his story.

"'For my own part,' said the dowager queen, 'I always eat it with my fingers.' She did so in effect, and I imitated her example.'"

Dicky saw no opening for any caustic remark after this brilliant anecdote, and Mr. Lilliecrip dictated—still in his cold, impressive manner—two or three more anecdotes, which were also too vapid to present the slightest opening for any comment, involving nothing more than an innuendo against the virtue of a noble lady deceased, and another greatly dishonouring a celebrated statesman, also deceased. Then he took a bundle of papers, and tossed them across the

table to Dicky, ordering him to read them aloud for his correction.

Dicky proceeded to obey mechanically. Presently he observed that his patron was staring straight before him, obviously not attending His imagination was in that fine state of activity which is peculiar to a condition of chronic nightly intoxication, gently stimulated by a "hair of the dog that bit you" in the morning. And he gave it full play, reading in a sonorous and even melodious tone, while the unconscious Mr. Lilliecrip sat with his thoughts wandering.

I regret to say that he made nonsense of the invaluable Memoirs; more than that, as he saw that he was not observed, he introduced irrelevant and even improbable matter, with anachronisms of the wildest kind, and anecdotes of his own invention. Never had Dicky been so carried away by the force of his own imagination. Like a pent-up stream, the waters of fancy gushed and bubbled out, and, like the winter torrents in a thirsty land, they brought ruin and destruction with them, instead of fertility and smiling vegetation. Impunity emboldened him. Now and then he looked up; but seeing Mr.

Lilliecrip motionless, he proceeded with his fatal comedy. After reading in this irreverent and burlesque manner for a quarter of an hour or so, he might, had he been looking off the paper at the moment, have remarked a sudden change in the Hermit's eyes—only for a moment. His lips twitched, his colour came and went, and then he sat as before—his cold, calm eyes still gazing into space, as if he was thinking of something far away.

"The first time I ever saw Peter the Hermit" —Dicky was reading with a full richness of tone which showed his own enjoyment of the situation—"the first time I ever saw Peter the Hermit was on the occasion when the then Dean of Westminster, against the opinion of the leading clergy, introduced him to the Abbey to preach a charity sermon for the Crusade. They collected eighteen marks and a groat, a large sum for those days. The whole was handed to Peter, who put it in his pocket with a genial wink. After the collection, we dined together—a quiet dinner at the Ship, for Peter was fond of whitebait. King Richard was there, Sir Robert Peel, Mr. Gladstone, Bismarck, Saladin, the Dean,

and Bolingbroke. Nobody else but myself. The conversation turned after dinner upon gallantry. I was astonished at the freedom with which the English statesmen expressed their opinions, especially Mr. Gladstone. Peter told some capital stories. I only remember one, and that, I am sorry to say, I am unable to repeat. The taste of the age, as is well known, was then different to our own. Peter was no exception, and Sir Robert enjoyed a free anecdote. As for Saladin, he broke his chair with laughing. The secret history of the Crusades has yet to be written. If I have time, I shall write it.

"It is not generally known that the 'Wandering Jew' was staying in Lowland-street, Tottenham-court-road, about ten years ago. He had lodgings on the second floor, where he used to cook his own meals. His name was never uttered to anybody except myself, and I have promised not to reveal it unless he gives permission. He was a cheery bird, fond of singing the 'Steam Leg,' which was his only song; but he was a grumbler, and often complained of fatigue. The knowledge of drinks which he had gathered during his long peregrinations was ex-

traordinary, and many is the artful compound he has brewed for me. I have the receipts, and mean to write them out at the end of my Memoirs. He always declared dry champagne to be the best and most wholesome of liquors. After that he placed Allsopp — when you have it genuine. He did not like quassia in his malt. I never could get him to tell me whence he drew his supplies; but he seemed to have letters of credit on all the banks in the world. He was a man of innumerable *bonnes fortunes*. He loved kidneys for breakfast. He once said to me, after a night of it, 'Lord ——, a man of your transcendent abilities ought to do something for the world, if it is only to double the salary of your secretary, and to offer him an occasional glass of ale—'"

"Enough of this buffoonery, sir," said Mr. Lilliecrip, rising, with great solemnity. "This is Monday. We will consider our engagement at an end from this moment. I owe you, I believe, at the rate of three shillings a visit, the sum of six shillings. There is the amount. Leave the room!"

For the moment Dicky, who was still in the

full flow of recollections, hardly comprehended the blow. He dropped the papers, and gazed stupidly in Mr. Lilliecrip's face.

"You hear me, sir. Leave the room! Not a word of explanation or apology. Go; and let me see your face no more."

Dicky made haste to seize the six shillings—that was, at least, something tangible. Then he pulled himself together. As it was quite clear that he was dismissed, and he saw very plainly that he had done for himself entirely, he concluded not to go without relieving his mind in some degree of his real feelings.

"What, because I enlivened the monotony of your rubbish by substituting some better stories of my own? Come forth, Hermit of the Dale—don't be unreasonable!"

Mr. Lilliecrip turned paler, if that were possible.

"I have known," says Dicky, assuming an air of dignity quite beyond his income, "for a long time that the pretended Memoirs were nothing but falsehoods, which you intended to palm off upon the world as real Memoirs and recollections. Why, man, there is not a page in the

whole collection but will confute you as soon as it is printed, if it appears in the next ten years. And if it is kept dark for fifty, the dense stupidity of the thing will damn it infallibly. Besides which, my own self-respect was at stake in being a party to this impudent forgery."

"Give me back those papers, sir, and leave the room."

Mr. Lilliecrip trembled visibly as he spoke. Perhaps a hermitage of fourteen years' duration does not strengthen the nerves.

"No," said the rebellious secretary, folding them up—"I shall keep these; I mean to show them about. I shall tell the whole world what a humbug lives in Lowland-street. By Jove, there are the names of living statesmen among them. I will go to them, and let them know what is preparing. Your name and your pursuits shall be published, sir. You shall be made notorious. We shall find out who it is has been living here by himself for fourteen years. And you shall know what it is to call Richard Carew an illiterate copying clerk."

He paused, for Mr. Lilliecrip was of a ghastly

pallor. Then Dicky hardened his heart, and went on—

"For three years I have endured you, and I am glad it is over. You Pagan pretender, you treated me like a dog. You unchristian monk, you gave me the wages of a dog. You had no more consideration for the man who worked for you than if he had been a machine. I always longed to tell you my mind, and now I have. Unholy Hermit, you are a humbug!"

He produced the papers, folded up in a roll, and flourished them in his enemy's face.

"Now I have you in my power," he said, melodramatically. "Now, impostor, hiding away because you are ashamed or afraid to face the world, I can do what I please with you. You shall be unmasked. You are in my power. Ha! ha!"

It was quite the realization of his dream, and a thing altogether to be enjoyed.

"This is too much," cried the Recluse. "Give me back my papers, or I will force them from you."

"Will you fight me for them?" asked Dicky, who was as plucky a man as ever drank Devon-

shire cider. "I wish you would. My wind is not so good as it was, but I could double you up like an empty thread-paper. Or will you ring the bell, and send for a policeman? If you do, I will stay here till he comes, and make you go before the magistrates, and give your real name. All Lowland-street will come too. I shall tell the magistrate that I would no longer be a party to an abominable deception of posterity, and am before him in consequence."

He placed the roll in his pocket, put on his hat, and took up the clouded cane of which he was so fond.

"You will see me again, Simon Stylites," he observed, at the door. "I resign your employment. I shall look in upon you in a day or two, and report progress. I am going to be your bugbear. For the present, good morning."

He left the room with a loftiness of bearing which pleased himself immensely. His soul was in a tumult of pleasure at the recollection of the many fine things he had said; nor was it till some hours afterwards, when the flurry of his spirits had in a measure subsided, that he

began to realize the importance of the salary he had lost.

It was to Mrs. Medlar that he communicated, first of all, the news of his revolt, and the eloquence with which he had conducted the business of the final scene.

"But you have lost your salary, and how will you live?"

This was a new light, in which he had not thought of regarding the situation.

"Go back and make terms, Mr. Carew," she said—"go and offer him the papers back again for what he will give. Lord! what's the use of being proud? Why bite your nose off to spite your face? Make it up again. You know his secrets."

"Viper!"—he did not mean Mrs. Medlar—"Viper! I do. I shall grind him to powder beneath this heel."

"Well," she replied, "there isn't much left to grind with; and if you don't make it up with him there won't be any sole left either. However in the world could you go to be so foolish? The usual thing, I suppose—a drop of something. Now, mind, Mr. Carew, you don't marry

me unless you take the pledge. I don't mean to have an intemperate husband, and to make quite sure you shall take the pledge."

She offered him no refreshment; she gave him no applause. It was as if Amadis de Gaul, after his proudest achievement, when he conquered the giants of Armenia and carried them away captive to the enchanted Princess of the Island of Morocco, had been received by the chosen of his heart with a scoff and a question instead of an accolade or a chaste salute.

Dicky felt the reception deeply.

"For thy sake," he might have said—"for thy sake, Lady Medlar, have I recovered the self-respect of an honest man. What if the spirit which prompted the deed was fortified and encouraged by a draught of Burton — old and mild?"

Alas! many a notable gest has been lost to the world through the want of appreciation of those who first hear it. And there are some women, love they never so madly, who cannot convert their husbands into heroes.

CHAPTER VII.

IT must be owned that Dicky, face to face with the immediate loss to his income caused by his freedom of speech, felt next morning a little out of spirits. He did not follow Mrs. Medlar's advice, and humiliate himself before his enemy, having an instinctive assurance that it would serve no useful purpose. On the contrary, he carried his plunder, the roll of manuscript Memoirs, to the British Museum, to read them, with a view of doing what mischief he could to the man who had dared to call him illiterate.

Away from the personal influence of the Hermit, whose cold and measured manner never failed at the time to impress the amanuensis with a profound sense of truthfulness, Dicky found it horrible to realize the prodigiousness of

the vast collection of lies. They were gross, palpable, and foolish lies. They were slanderous. They betrayed themselves. They were full of anachronisms; dead and living men were mixed; and they had not, as some of these anecdotes of social life have, the spice of ill-nature and epigram wanted to make them attractive. The Hermit was a poor storyteller. The stories he told were like those of the very bad French novelists who lived under the Consulate and First Empire—their works are nearly all out of print, but you may get hold of them now and then if you search—who have no other recommendation than a gush of language without parallel in literature, and comparable only to the mouth of a main drain. The Hermit was not only a weak and foolish man—weak on the side of personal vanity, foolish in shutting himself up because he had a spite against the world—but he was a man full of morbid desires and tastes. He courted notoriety. Men have been known, for the sake of notoriety, to abandon wife and children, pass as martyrs, and take up the most unhealthy forms of extreme opinions in a party cry. No one, so far as I know—

except Mr. Greville and my Hermit—ever deliberately contemplated the purchase of immortality by the production of clap-trap and sensation memoirs.

Dicky read and made notes, thinking best how to turn his plunder to his own gain and the discomfiture of his enemy. Mr. Lilliecrip called him illiterate! Ah! And copying clerk. Good. Pretended that he had no acquaintance with French—did he? And but a partial acquaintance with English. Very rich—very correct indeed. Dicky would be revenged; but he did not yet quite see his way. Presently the clock struck one, and he was reminded of the dinner hour.

There are many shady retreats in the neighbourhood of the British Museum where the weary student may find refreshment—there used to be one, indeed, in the institution itself; but the authorities, who in the cause of knowledge are inexorable, discovered that the country people preferred Banbury cakes to Babylon bulls, veal and ham pies to mummies and marbles, and so at length removed it. Among the neighbouring hostelries, the one chosen by

Dicky and his immediate circle of friends owned a sanded floor, a large fireplace, and half a dozen wooden cribs, with settles, like those of the Cheshire Cheese and the Cock—a device by which the proprietors persuaded the unthinking that their steaks and chops had a hidden virtue unknown to places where the floor is carpeted and the seats are cushioned.

He was still suffering from the excitement natural after a battle in which barren honour was the only result on which he could pride himself. He dined alone, although there were friends in the other boxes. After his chop, he ordered a glass of the beverage which best he loved, whisky and water hot, and lighting a pipe —you may smoke in this establishment—began to think how to recover his losses. Fifteen shillings a week. It was a good deal to lose. It was half his income.

While he smoked, stirred his grog, and meditated, he was disturbed—agreeably at first—by the entrance of a man he knew.

He was a very big man, with whiskers which grew all round his face and stuck out under his chin, leaving that feature free and clean. This

gave him a truculent expression. He looked all round the room, and spotting his man, who was no other than Dicky, strode noisily across the floor, and banging his fist on the table, uttered these remarkable words, in the deepest bass ever heard—

"You precious scoundrel!"

The other gentlemen in Dicky's walk of life who were dining at the time naturally took a lively pleasure in the prospect of a row; there was a general silence, and craning of heads round the divisions.

"You precious scoundrel!" the stranger repeated. Then, observing the presence of others, he addressed the company generally.

"Gentlemen, I put it to you. You shall judge what a villain this fellow is. I have engaged him for the last two years on a paper—a property of my own, gentlemen. You, as literary men, will appreciate the care and trouble I have had to nurse this property. My own child, gentlemen. I invented the title; I found the capital to start it; I bore the loss for six months—though I could ill afford it. This double-dyed blackguard—"

"Draw it mild—I say," expostulated one of the hearers. "It isn't parliamentary."

"No, sir, I repeat, this double-dyed blackguard, to whom I have paid—ah! paid Enormous sums of money—"

"Well," said Dicky, driven to desperation—"it was seven and six a week. What is it I've done? Tell me quickly, can't you? Play up your pretty pipe, shepherd."

The big man gnashed his teeth at this allusion to his voice.

"This snake in the grass, gentlemen—but I must tell you that mine is a Christian paper, and a Church paper. It is no other than the *Christian Clerk and Vestrymen's Bosom Friend.*"

It is difficult to explain why the countenances of the assembly relaxed, and their faces broadened with smiles. But so it was.

"The *Christian Clerk*—my property, my title. You will hardly believe, gentlemen, that after being in my employ on that paper for two years—after receiving, as I said, Enormous sums of money—he sends me last week a collection of infamous paragraphs, bringing the clergy into ridicule, attacking the aristocracy, and breathing

nothing short of open infidelity! Would you believe that, gentlemen? And I trusted him, gentlemen, and printed it all, without even reading his proofs."

There was a universal shout.

Dicky, in a cold perspiration, saw at once—with a fearful foreboding of what would happen next—what *had* happened. He said nothing, but looked mutely round the well-known faces for sympathy.

He received none. They were all laughing, except the unlucky proprietor of the paper, who raged in their midst.

There was one other exception. In the box next to Dicky's, but nearer the door, there sat a bearded gentleman, perhaps the greatest Bohemian of them all, who, instead of laughing with the rest, fixed his eyes on the injured editor, and gravely wagged his head, expressing by this movement his profound sympathy with the *Christian Clerk*.

Then Dicky laughed himself, and the merriment was general. But a worse thing happened. Another man, whose face was only too well known to Mr. Carew, opened the door, and

looked up and down the room. Seeing the person he was in search of, he darted with a tigerish bound and something like a yell towards Dicky's table.

"Now, sir," he cried, in a profound voice, and banging his fist on the table with a crash that rattled the crockery all over the room—"now, sir, what have you got to say to me?"

"Nothing," said Dicky—"only take care of the plates, and don't destroy the property. They charge a great deal here for a broken glass."

There was instantly a dead silence.

The man was a very little man indeed, with an immense head and bearded face, a very ferocious type of man—one who would have called himself Lucius Junius Brutus in the first years of the Revolution, and paraded the streets bawling "Death to Tyrants!"

Dicky knew him, too; but he was now reckless.

"Destroy the property?" echoed the newcomer. "Destroyer of property yourself. Tell me again, what have you to say? I will expose you among your friends. Listen, gentlemen. This man has been on my staff for two years. I

have learned to trust him. He has written for the *Weekly Intelligence—my* property, gentlemen."

There was a grin of universal expectation on every face, except that of the hairy gentleman above named, who caught the little man's eye, and shook his head with a sympathizing gravity.

"The *Weekly Intelligence.* No doubt many of you here are subscribers." There was another grin at this hypothesis, which showed too amiable a confidence in the purchasing and reading powers of his audience. "This man here wrote for me."

"Are you," asked the proprietor of the *Christian Clerk*—"are you the editor of that infamous journal? And do you, sir"—he turned to Dicky—"do you dare to say you wrote for the *Christian Clerk* at the same time that you wrote for the *Weekly Intelligence?* Hypocrite!"

Dicky wagged his head, but answered not.

"Infamous journal, sir! What do you mean?" cried the little man. "I'll make you know, sir; I'll teach you, sir."

As he advanced, the big man retreated, being, indeed, an egregious coward. But before he left the room he shook his fist at Dicky.

"You are discharged, sir. You are discharged. Ask for what I owe you, if you dare."

As he left the room, the sympathetic man of letters rose and left too. In five minutes he returned, and turned his grave and thoughtful face upon the other editor.

He was still haranguing the room. He told how he had trusted in the Radical principles of the man before him; how he believed him superior to the trammels of superstition; how he denounced kings, priests, and nobles, with a cheerful vigour which raised the circulation of the paper—

"Then you ought to have raised my pay," said Dicky.

— How his own confidence grew to such an extent that he even allowed the proofs to pass unread; and how—gentlemen—how on this Sunday morning his attention had been called by a friend to an article in which the bishops and clergy of the Church of England were held up to general admiration as possessing all the virtues.

There was no sympathy with this editor any more than with the first. He looked upon the

grinning faces around with a disgust too great for words. The bearded and long-haired man near the door preserved a calm and even sad demeanour when the editor's glance fell upon him, only raising his hands in deprecation of Dicky's iniquity.

"Now, Mr. Carew," he wound up, "you shall not say I tried to cheat you; there's your money in full"—he threw three half-crowns upon the table—"and take your discharge."

He put on his hat with tremendous vigour, and, hurling defiant glances right and left, walked swiftly out.

The man who had not laughed went out after him.

Dicky, in the midst of acclamations, rose solemnly.

"It's all true, gentlemen," he said. "I wrote for both those papers, and I must have mixed the articles. Anybody who knows of a vacancy may recommend me."

"If I hear of any, Dicky, that I can't fill myself, you shall have the office," said one of them.

The second clause of the proviso exactly

suited the sentiments of the rest, who all repeated it, with slightly verbal alterations. Then the man with the long hair and the ragged beard came back, with transfigured and radiant countenance.

He had secured both jobs.

That man, the only one who saw the opportunity and seized it, is now in comparative affluence. He is the principal literary prop of the *Christian Clerk*—whose circulation has trebled during the late Christian revival—and he has led the *Weekly Intelligence* to dazzling heights of revolutionary audacity, in which even the editor himself sometimes feels dizzy. Of course his pay is trebled too.

The moral is obvious.

It was with a heavy heart that Dicky turned into the street when the afternoon *séance* finished. No occasion for him to go back to the Museum for the present. The pamphlets and the magazines might rest undisturbed. His occupation was gone, and with it his salary.

Presently he reflected on the cause of the sudden downfall of his worldly prospects; and he remembered that a third glass of gin and

water was the cause of the fatal exchange of "copy" for the papers, while an unwonted early visit to the house of convivial hospitality caused the outbreak with the Hermit.

Then he met Miss Ethelreda Vyvyan in Holborn, on her way home from rehearsal. She skipped up, in her artless and cheerful manner, and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Dicky, my boy, the grandmother is ill—poor old girl!—and you must pay up."

"Pay up, Popsy?"

"Don't call me Popsy, because it's cheek, and I won't allow it. I am Ethelreda Vyvyan, of the Royal Hemisphere Theatre, if you please. But you must pay up, old boy, whether you call me Popsy or Ready; and it's close upon five pounds. I'll toss you whether we make it five-ten or a fiver clear—come."

"I'm going into the City instantly," said Mr. Carew, "to see my lawyer. He is engaged in selling out some stock for me."

"Ah! and going down to Westmorland afterwards to see your dear old aunt, who sends you such regular supplies, are you not? Now, Dicky, pay up, and no more humbug between friends.

I wouldn't bother, old man, if I didn't want the dibs—I wouldn't, really."

"I haven't got any money, Popsy. That's the real truth."

"Then give me what you have."

"I've got nothing, Popsy, except a pound; and I must pay my rent, mustn't I? Your Dicky would have to find a lodging in the 'cauld, cauld blast.' Oh! shelter me."

"Dicky, it's pretty clear you've been going it a little too free. Now, take my advice, and stop it. You can pay grandmother at so much a week, if you like; but no shirking. Come and see me to-morrow morning, and tell me what you are going to do."

Poor Dicky! He was going to do nothing—there was nothing to do.

Then he began to curse his ill fortune.

Then he advanced a step, and cursed his fatal habit of drink.

Then he became suddenly and strongly repentant.

And then, giving the rein to these wholesome meditations, he wandered up and down the street, revolving wholesomely the evil effects of

drink, till he came upon a place where a card was posted in the window inviting all to enter and take the pledge.

Dicky thought of Mrs. Medlar's advice, obeyed the invitation, and, without further consideration, put down the penny, and took the oath.

At half-past nine that evening there was a knock at Mrs. Medlar's door.

It was Dicky Carew. He was leaning for support against the doorpost. His hat was at the back of his head. He carried the clouded cane, but it was broken. His knees bent beneath him. He bore the external appearance of one who had been drinking, not wisely, but too well.

Mrs. Medlar looked at him with rising wrath.

"What have you got in your hand?" she asked.

"Itsh pledge," Dicky replied. "I've come—tell you—Mishush Med—Med—Medlar—followed advishe, ekshlent advishe—took pledge, thought you'd like—look at it. Besht of women. Thought I'd pleashe you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

S for the head of the Revel house—the unlucky Fred—he was spending his three days of grace in a condition of absolute terror and remorse. He saw the hour approaching—he counted the strokes—when the home, such as it was, of his sisters would be literally stripped; and he did not dare tell the secret. He sat and listened, pretending to take an interest in their hopes and plans. He did not dare to tell his wife—the wife whom he did not dare to own. As always happens, he repented when it was too late. I do not know whether his repentance was quite of the kind advocated by the Christian preacher; but it was deep and real, because he was extremely sorry. He knew that there was going to be a *mauvais quart d'heure*, and he did

not at all see his way clear to making things pleasant when the furniture was actually carried off. He foresaw the winged words of Adie, the tears of Marion; and he dreaded the explanation he should have to offer to his wife.

For ten pounds and a box of cigars he had bought this misery. It was the dearest purchase he had ever made.

Frederick Revel was not a young man who preferred evil to good; nor had he what is meant when we talk of the vices of a young man. He did not, for instance, like Mr. Richard Carew, fall about the stairs on his way to bed. But he loved the semblance of an easy life, and he desired above all to keep things smooth. Had he been a prophet in Israel in those days when the kings liked to have pleasant oracles, though Rabshakeh, with the Tartan of Esarbanipal, was already knocking at the gate Gennath, Fred Revel would have sat before the king with smiling face and brow of unclouded sweetness, prophesying the most delightful future. For the sake of keeping things pleasant for himself, he was content to take Marion's money day by day. In order to make life more plea-

sant, he fell in love with Winifred. And not to disturb the existing pleasantness, he had forborne to consult his sister when he borrowed the money for which they were all of them now going to pay.

A contemptible young man? Well, yes—if you please. The curious thing about life is the way in which these contemptible young men sometimes manage to get liked. Everybody liked Fred. The women liked him for his bonny face, and that sweet smile of his which came so easily, meant so little, and yet seemed to mean so much. Men liked him, too—that is, men of a sympathetic turn—why, it would be hard to say, but principally because he was always in a good temper. Fred spoke ill of no man, because he harboured no malice. He never clashed with any one, because he had no ambition. He never refused to listen, and never grumbled at his own lot. Think what it is to be a man who is nobody's rival, who envies no man, who is in no one's way, and who is always genial, friendly, and in a good humour. A most contemptible young man; but there are plenty of his kind, like those pretty, fair-weather craft lying at anchor up

Haslar Creek. A young man whose ideas of pleasure would expand with his available powers of spending and borrowing, but who would never cease to desire enjoyment of some kind, were it only that of the Neapolitan beggar—to lie in the shade, and enjoy the softened reflection of the glaring sun from the opposite wall. A young man to whom work of any kind is so distasteful as to be impossible: a man without a backbone.

The day before the fatal morning, he made a little effort to communicate the trouble that was impending.

It was after breakfast. Marion was engaged upon her work. Adie was preparing to go marketing. Fred was walking up and down the room restlessly.

"Marion," he said, "I want forty pounds."

She remembered a former request that she should invest money in a sleeping partnership.

"What is it for, Fred?"

"Never mind what it is for. Will you let me have it?"

"How can I? I have not a quarter of the money."

"Pshaw! always the same story. Have you not fifteen hundred pounds in the Stocks? Can you not sell out a paltry hundred for me when I ask you?"

"My poor Fred," she replied, "how often am I to tell you that the income we get from that sum is our only stand-by, and that nothing —no necessity, however pressing — shall make me part with it?"

Even then—had he only told her! But he did not dare.

She put on her hat hastily, and went out of the room, on her constant and never-ending errand of work and money. He looked after her, and groaned. His last chance of raising the money was gone.

In the language of certain writers, Fred was not quite bad, because he was sorry to think of what was coming upon him. All the rogues who somehow miss general abhorrence may be defended by much the same plea. The French jury brought in extenuating circumstances for the man who had murdered his father and his mother, on the ground that he was an orphan. We are told that M. Kakistos is not wholly a

villain, because he loves his mother, or because he sheds tears of repentance before his flogging, or because he has given a sovereign to convert the natives of Fiji, or because he assures the chaplain that he is sorry for having murdered his grandfather, tortured his grandmother, beaten his wife, and starved his children. Where is the old-fashioned villain, all wickedness, and as hard as nails? Nowhere. I declare that he is extinct —gone out with cock-fighting, the P. R., the highway robber, and Jonathan Wild. But plenty of things as bad as those he used to do are perpetrated by smooth-handed young gentlemen like Fred Revel. What he had done was as bad. And yet he was no vulgar rogue, and would have scorned any action which might seem to him openly dishonest.

And what would Winifred say?

A man of so gelatinous a nature ought not to have fallen in love at all. Of course, love is intended to imply intelligent selection. It involves an average vigour of mind, a certain amount of determination and pluck—none but the brave, we know, deserve the fair. It means perseverance, because every *petit commis* who

marries on a hundred and twenty pounds a-year is proud of having achieved, by industry and the display of extraordinary talents, a position which enables him to bring his bride to her cottage home. It means self-reliance; because no one would get engaged who was not full of trust in his own abilities. It makes, in the popular estimation, a great many lesser things —notably, a proof of the unselfish nature of the young man, in giving up everything, club-life, independence, liberty, and the rest, for the sake of a woman.

Yes. But Fred, unfortunately, flew in the face of the moral philosophy of love by slipping into it because it was pleasant, and by marrying secretly because that was more pleasant.

What is to be done with a man whose only notion of life is to have and to enjoy? It is fitting that sorrow and vexation should fall upon him. It is well to read him stern lessons which he must learn, whether he likes it or not, and may lay to heart if he chooses; but what about those on whom his actions bring trouble? There are three women now—at first there were but

two—who will mourn and lament if this young man come to harm.

He was a worthless chap, said schoolmaster Owen—who ought to know a worthless chap when he saw one, if experience is any use. It is not for me to defend him, or to ask for any sympathy. From his childhood upwards, he had grasped at pleasure as the only good. He was blinded by his own passionate desire for enjoyment. He could not see beyond the present, he could not suffer more than the present pain. Why people liked him it is impossible to say, except that it was because he was so sanguine and so light-hearted.

But here is a point of difficulty. He was, being a poor man, quite useless, and morally inferior. Suppose he had been rich, what a wealth of good qualities would have covered over and hidden, so that they could never have been suspected, these faults which bad fortune brought conspicuously to the front. He could not work, it is true, having no power of application; nor could he refrain from present enjoyment if it was in any way to be obtained; but these were defects quite unlikely to be noted in

the daily life and conversation of a wealthy man. On the other hand, he was as handsome as Apollo; he was physically brave; he was truthful; he was honest and honourable in such general dealings as required no money; he had proclivities in the direction of art; he was of good taste, and as generous as Alcibiades. In fact, Fred often reminded me of that gallant who, in his turn, seems to have moulded his character on the well-known model of Absalom. Probably tradition brought the story of Absalom to Athens by way of Tyre and Cyprus.

Whence it follows that prosperity, and not adversity at all, has uses as sweet as the fire to a bottle of port on a frosty day. I believe I should myself — but of course we should all be better, once out of the mire of savagery and over-feeding, were we free to go our own way, cultivate our taste, and gratify our sympathies. Lord, make and keep us rich. Amen.

Fred appeared this morning in a state of agitation quite irregular and previously unknown. For the first time in his life he was ashamed of himself. He was in the position of

a criminal about to be arrested, to whom escape was impossible.

He had trifled with his breakfast, and eaten nothing. Marion, busy with her thoughts, took no notice, and presently went away on a commercial visit to Mr. Burls. Adie, who poured out his tea for him, saw there was something wrong, but forbore till Marion was gone.

"Now," she said, when the door was closed upon her sister, "what is it, Fred? Tell me."

"Nothing," he replied, faintly.

"Don't talk nonsense. Tell me everything."

"Can you bear to hear everything?" he asked, in a hollow voice, not at all feigned.

"I must, I suppose, some time or other," said his sister. "Come, Fred, dear, don't be a baby. Take your finger out of your mouth, and let me have a clean breast at once."

"Well, hang it, Adie, you might be a little sympathetic. You know how unlucky I've been."

"I do know that, Fred." She patted his hand with her soft and slender fingers, and sank down at his feet in a pretty, unstudied attitude—all Adie's attitudes were unstudied. "I do know,

Fred. You've been so unlucky as to be born with a great desire for good things and no money. So have I. I am exactly like you. Nobody could be more unlucky than you and I. Let us sympathize together. Poor Marian is not too lucky either, because she has to work for all three of us. Let us sympathize with her too."

"Three months ago, Adie, I was hard up," he began, solemnly.

"Why, my dear boy, what were you yesterday, or four months ago, or any time since I first knew you? You were hard up when we were in the nursery together. For goodness sake do not look so solemn, Fred, you frighten me."

"Do let me go on, Adie; it is no laughing matter. I went to a man named Saul, a money-lender, and asked for an advance. He came here to see the security."

"What security?" asked Adie, with quickening apprehension.

"The—the furniture, you know."

"But that is not yours. It is Marion's."

"It is mine and yours, I suppose, as well as

Marion's. My father left no will. At all events, it is too late to ask whose it is, because he came here and took an inventory. Then he made me sign a bill of sale—"

"What is that?"

"And gave me ten pounds and a box of cigars. The bill was dated at three months, and it was for thirty pounds. Now it has mounted to forty. And, Adie, the bill falls due to-day."

"But, Fred, you have no money. Tell me, can he take you—oh! Fred, can he take you to prison?"

"No, but he can take the chairs and things—Hush!"—he turned very pale—"I hear steps on the stairs. They are coming up now."

Adie sprang to her feet, with a sudden horror upon her.

The door opened, and Mr. Saul appeared alone. But there were two men behind, and a van drew up to the door.

"Now, Mr. Revel," he said, taking off his hat with a bow to the young lady, "this is the day, you know, and I suppose you are ready to meet your liabilities."

"No, I am not."

"Hum! That's awkward. Then you have found a good name, perhaps?"

"No, I have not."

"Well, you will give me fresh security?"

"I have none."

"Not a single friend to help you? Not any to help this young lady? Not any other property?"

"None—nothing. You must do what you please."

"Ah! Well, I am very sorry, but we must proceed to remove the furniture. Benjamin, you may come in."

Two men came in, and without further ceremony began to put chairs together and move things about.

"What are they going to do, Fred?" cried Adie.

"They are going to take away all our furniture," her brother replied.

"I am very sorry, young lady—very sorry indeed, to place you to any inconvenience; but the law, you know—the law."

"But it is not my brother's furniture. It is my sister's, all of it."

"That's awkward too, because he said it was his own."

The men went on in a swift, businesslike way. In three journeys up and down stairs they had nearly dismantled the room.

"Not my music too," Adie cried, as a profane hand was laid upon her music stool.

"Everything, Benjamin," said Mr. Saul.

"Everything?" she asked. "Are you going to take our wardrobes?"

"Everything, Benjamin," said Mr. Saul, addressing his assistant, and not looking at the girl.

"Oh, stop!" she cried, "stay till my sister comes home. I think she will be able to pay off the money, or some of it. Spare our room, at any rate."

Mr. Saul waved his hand with dignity in the direction of Fred, as much as to say, "You see the real culprit. I pity, but cannot help you."

In the presence of the men Adie said nothing to her brother, who walked backwards and forwards with flushed cheek and restless step.

"Can't you stop them at all, Fred?" she asked. "Must everything go? Oh, what will Marion say?"

He seized his hat and rushed from the room, leaving the girl alone with the men.

"Show me," she said, "your authority for taking these things."

Saul drew out of his pocket the bill of sale.

"There is my authority, young lady. I would advise you not to resist it."

"Resist it? I resist it? How can I? Will you let me take one or two of my own things? They are in the other room."

"Benjamin," he replied, "go with the young lady into her room, and bring me what she wants to take away."

"No, sir," she said, proudly. "If I am to have the company of you and your assistants in my own room, I shall leave you to do your worst. The worst is to take away everything, is it not?"

"That is the worst," said Mr. Saul. "I assure you, if I had known that I was advancing money on the security of furniture used by a young lady, I would have refused the loan—I would, indeed."

"That is your worst. Then I will tell you that you are a cheat, and a thief, and a villain.

You gave my brother ten pounds, and you exact forty. You are a Shylock."

Mr. Saul, who had not expected to meet any one in the place except Fred, looked a little disconcerted.

By this time the furniture was reduced to the carpet, which the men began to take up.

"How glad I am," said Adie, "that Marion's picture is gone!"

"Eh? What? Picture?" Mr. Saul was evidently alarmed. "Where is the inventory? Why the devil, Benjamin, can't you tick off things? Where's the picture?"

"Pictures—there—here you are," said his assistant.

"Now, remember, young lady, if anything has been taken away, pledged, or lent, or sold, it is fraudulent, and will lead you and your brother into serious trouble. Benjamin, there's something about a picture that I don't understand. Go up to Mr. Revel's bed-room, three-pair back; look into the cupboard first, and then go out on the roof. Ah! I am a Shylock, am I? I've had to do with real ladies before now—not ladies in Lowland-street, with a brother who lives

by billiards—real ladies, and I've always found something put out upon the roof. Go and look well on the roof, Benjamin. There you'll find the picture, no doubt. *My* picture."

"I wish my brother was here, to thrash you," said Adie, with flashing eyes. "You cheat him because he is made to be the prey of such creatures as you; but you would not dare insult him before his face. When he is gone, you insult me. Of course, no one expects from a money-lender the smallest resemblance to a gentleman; but one might expect some trace of civilization. Costermongers, even, are careful in their speech when they talk to ladies. Money-lenders, I suppose, rank below costermongers."

The words were brave enough, but the girl's heart was swelling within her. Mr. Saul made no reply, but presently cursed Benjamin roundly because his visit to the roof produced nothing.

Then the carpet was taken up, and Adie remembered her friend the schoolmaster.

He was in school, presiding over his little band of twenty scholars, divided into two classes. They were the sons of the small shopkeepers in

Lowland-street and its environs—people too proud to send them to the National Schools, where they would have learned quite enough for all their wants in life, and feeling a glow of pride at the reflection that Johnny and Harry were learning Latin. Rhyl Owen, meantime, taught the children what he could, in the old-fashioned method of instruction, accompanied by the quick, old-fashioned method of stimulant. He was perched on his chair, with his little legs tucked under it, his long coat sweeping to the floor like an academical robe, and his puckered face bent over a battered copy of Cæsar. He was finishing off the grammatical portion of his lecture, and with one eye on the clock, which pointed to a quarter before twelve, was beginning a short address on the character and exploits of his author.

"What is it, Miss Adie?"—becoming suddenly conscious that the young lady was standing in front of his desk. "Silence, every boy, or I will cane the whole school, from top to bottom. Fifty lines for Smith—half an hour for Bumpus—all the school an hour to stay in."

"Come out as soon as you can, Mr. Owen,"

she whispered, with a tremulous voice. "Come out and see me, we are in terrible trouble."

The schoolmaster looked again at the clock. It wanted eight minutes to twelve. Nothing the parents disliked more than the dismissal of their boys a moment before the time. It was so much defrauded of their rights. Fortunately, he heard a clock somewhere striking the hour.

"We are five minutes slow," he said. "Boys, you may go. Those I told to stay in just now shall be let off for once."

All took up their books and were off in a moment, except two.

"There's Candy Secundus and Holybone Primus—kept in as usual," he explained. "Stay, I'll cane them both instead, and let them go. I sha'n't be a minute working them off. Come here, you boys, and be caned. You deserve it richly, both of you. Candy Secundus first, because he's the worst."

He grasped his cane and descended to the field of action—the small space in front of his desk, which acted as a narrow arena, there being just room, and nothing to spare, for the caning

of a boy. It was also the intellectual gymnasium, being used for the standing of a class, and such scholastic evolutions.

"No," said the girl. "Let them off this time. I am sure they have done nothing very bad. Go away, boys, as quick as you can; Mr. Owen is the kindest master in the world, and lets you off."

They needed no second invitation, but grinned and dispersed themselves. To be sure, a caning more or less mattered little.

The school-room empty, Adie sat down, and gave way to the tears that her pride kept back before the men above.

Mr. Owen waited patiently, standing before her with the cane still in his hand, and as if she was a culprit, and he was about to administer punishment.

"When you are composed, my dear," he said at length, shaking the instrument as if he meant to begin as soon as she was ready.

"I must cry," she said—"I am in such a rage that I must cry. Oh, Mr. Owen, it is worse than when I asked you to give me something to eat, and that was bad enough. Fred has been

borrowing money, and they are carrying away all our furniture."

"How much money?" Mr. Owen asked. "I've got—don't tell Winifred, because it was meant as a surprise for her—I've got twenty pounds in the Post-office bank. Will that be of any use? Come with me, my dear—no, you stay here, while I go and see what can be done."

He found Mr. Saul superintending the removal of the bed-room furniture.

"What is the amount of the debt?" he asked.

"More than you can pay, old shaver," Mr. Saul replied, with a fine politeness. "Now, don't interrupt by asking conundrums, but just get out of the way."

"What the devil do you mean?" the little Welshman cried, in a boiling rage. "I'm a friend of the family—"

"A pretty family—" the creditor began.

"Look here," said Mr. Owen, turning up the sleeves of his coat, which were much too long, in case matters should take an assault-and-battery turn, which he ardently desired. "Look here—I've asked you a civil question, and got an uncivil answer. I'll break every bone in

your great fat body, you lumbering money-grubber!"

There was little doubt, from the fiery and Early Briton-like expression of his eyes, that he would have done it—Cadwallader and Caractacus must have been awful warriors to tackle: one wonders how the Romans worried through with the job. Mr. Saul collapsed. That is, he became civil.

"I'm sure I don't want to say anything against the family. The young man will make me lose a lot as it is, and that's enough, I take it. But perhaps you will pay the amount. It's a matter of above thirty-nine nineteen. Say forty."

That was too much. Mr. Owen groaned aloud.

"Can't you give us a day or two to look round?"

"Why, you've already had three days. Be reasonable, now. Benjamin, wake up. Hang it, one would think you were working by the hour! Now then, sir; there's the case—cash advanced, bill of sale on the furniture; no money forthcoming, furniture sold. Is that straight and fair, or isn't it? If it isn't, pay the

money on the nail to me, Mr. Saul, of Thavie's Inn, and the goods shall all be taken out of the cart again."

Mr. Owen retreated.

"My dear," he said, "is there no one else to ask?"

"Of course there is. There is Dr. Chacomb. Oh, even Marion would not mind my asking his help in such a strait as this. He will be at the hospital now."

Mr. Owen had a short interview with the great physician, who was in the very rush and flow of business. But he came away with the schoolmaster instantly.

"I know Saul. I've had dealings with him. Here—Hansom! Now then, Mr. Owen, jump in."

"Fred Revel is a more worthless rascal than ever I thought him," said the schoolmaster.

"You know him—yes, you know the family? I have heard of you, Mr. Owen, and your daughter."

"Yes, I know him," said the schoolmaster, savagely. "Curse him!"

"Ah, you would like to punch his reckless young head. It's no good, my dear sir, not

the least good in the world. He belongs to a tribe on whom kicking would be quite thrown away. I am sure you must have observed, in your professional experience, some boys who are none the better for all your benevolent caning, and would be none the better if Solomon was in your chair."

"I have," said Mr. Owen. "Candy Secundus is a case in point. And I've often thought that Alcibiades must have been another. He once boxed a schoolmaster's ears, and does not appear to have been caned for it, as he should have been if it had been me."

"No doubt. I am going to see Mr. Saul, and get the sticks back again. No experience will teach that boy anything."

Mr. Owen got down at the usurer's office, and hastened back to comfort Adie.

He found her in the dismantled and empty room. With her, Marion.

"I could sit down and cry, Marion," she was saying, "if there was anything to sit down upon. But one cannot cry standing, it's too ridiculous. It's like the nuns in the picture. And, besides, it won't bring back our things."

"Where is Fred?" Marion asked.

"I do not know. He ran away, and left me to face the enemy by myself. Marion, don't say anything to the poor boy."

Adie, as we have seen before, reserved to herself jealously the right of reproaching her brother—a right which she executed in secret, and with discretion.

"What could I say, Adie? The thing is, what are we to do?"

"Come downstairs, Miss Marion," said the schoolmaster. "You shall have Winifred's room, and Winifred and Miss Adie shall have mine, and I will sleep up here on the floor till you get your things back."

"And Fred?" asked Marion.

"Fred may sleep on *his* floor," replied Adie. "As he has done all the mischief, let him have some of the suffering."

"Mr. Owen," Marion said, "how shall we thank you?"

She took his hand, and looked her thanks with swimming eyes.

"He wanted to lend us all the money he had in the world," Adie cried. "I thank him,"

throwing her arms round the little man's neck. "I thank him—so."

She kissed him a dozen times, till his cheeks burned with unwonted glow, and his eyes looked as fiery as Prince Llewellyn's, or those of the bard praying that ruin might seize the ruthless king. Then, because his heart was full, he pulled himself from the girl's embrace, and hurried downstairs.

"Adie," Marion began—

"Marion," interrupted her sister, "please, don't look so solemn. Now listen, and reproach me afterwards. Things were too serious for thinking about what was proper, and so I just sent that dear little man to the Hospital for Gout, and told Dr. Chacomb."

Marion sighed.

"Yes, dear—that's just what I did. As Dr. Chacomb does not want to marry me, there is no pocketing of what they call maidenly reserve. Besides, I want my dresses back again. If they were to be sold, we should have—just think—not a single thing in the world except what we stand in. Not even a clean collar to put on."

But they had another and an unexpected

friend, who now tapped at the door. It was Dicky Carew.

"Miss Marion," he began, in a breathless way, "am I too late?"

"What for, Mr. Carew? We have had our furniture seized, that is all."

"But it can't be sold at a moment's notice. They had no business to carry it off at all. I saw them removing the things in the van, and asked whose they were. Then I hurried round to my place to get some papers. Please wait a quarter of an hour if you can."

He left them again, and they heard him run upstairs and knock at the Hermit's door. He was in his dressing-gown, reading his valuable Memoirs.

"Mr. Lilliecrip—" Dicky began.

"You need not make any apologies, Mr. Carew—they are worthless. Nothing would induce me to employ you any more. You have brought me back my papers, I suppose?"

"Apologies be hanged!" he replied. "I've lost more than your appointment since I saw you last. That is not what I came for, Mr. Lilliecrip. And as for the papers of yours in my

possession, what would you give to get them back?"

"Eh?"

"What would you give me, supposing I sold them to you back again? Mind, they are worth a great deal. They are worth all my revenge, because I intended showing them about. I was going to make you a general laughing-stock. I was going to take it out of you for my three years' servitude. Now I offer to sell them to you. What will you give?"

Mr. Lilliecrip gasped for breath.

"Come, now, my jovial Hermit"—Dicky, being quite recovered, was able to afford a little geniality. "Come, now, friar of the lonely dell, set the muscatel a-flowing. Ah, stay, gentle stranger." Dicky pointed to the cupboard. "There's no rest like the tap for the Pilgrim of Love."

"You would—ah!—you would like a glass of wine?"

"I would, strange as it may appear. Palmer with the sandal shoon and cockles in thy hair, I would for once taste of thy hospitality."

Mr. Lilliecrip opened the cupboard door.

Dicky's wildest dreams were more than realized, for it was full of bottles with silver foil.

"Moselle or champagne, Mr. Carew? Or perhaps you would prefer sparkling Burgundy?"

"Sparkling Burgundy sounds rich," said Dicky; "but I should like a whole bottle of champagne just for once. Come, holy father, brother cellarer, brother cook, and brother treasurer to boot, let us have a bottle of the creamiest and the driest. I am like Byron, because I can't resist the offer of champagne. And I am not like Byron, because I was never offered any before. Corkscrew, aged Ascetic."

Dicky was master of the situation, and he felt it. Besides, a state of absolute destitution as regards income is not at first without a certain exhilaration, a gentle stimulus to the spirits.

He took a tumbler, poured out a glass, and drank it off, with a nod and a smack of the lips.

"'Gad!" he said. "Do you positively mean to tell me that you mortify the flesh day after day with this"—he poured out another, and drank it—"this nectar? 'The Pope he leads a happy life'"—another glass—"only three tum-

blers in a bottle? I should like another. But no."

He finished it, and sat on the table, dangling his legs, with a beaming countenance.

"Come, Solitary of Sahara, what will you give me for this precious manuscript? Here are your recollections of King Pharaoh, and how you dined with Rehoboam. Here is a bolster of about the liveliest lies ever put together. What shall we say for this lot? Refuse, and they go, with a history of the Hermit of Lowland-street, supposed by some to be the Wandering Jew, to the *Daily Firework*. I shall get the job. I shall write three columns in leaded type. Buzwing, who attends our evenings, will do the leader. You will be so shown up to derision, so illustrated and exemplified by every big name, from Gyges to Napoleon, that on the whole I think you will wish you had not quarrelled with your private secretary, and never gone into the hermiting line. Come, what shall we say?"

"You have me at a disadvantage," replied the Hermit, whose face, during Dicky's harangue, had expressed every shade of terror and de-

jection. "I wish to have the papers back: that is quite true. Your presence is offensive, and I wish to see you gone; and I wish also to buy your silence."

"Buy them all," said Dicky—"buy them all, rollicking reveller and lonely tippler. I am in a hurry. Thirty pounds will buy the lot."

Mr. Lilliecrip hesitated.

"Thirty pounds before I count three, or I go. One."

"But I—"

"Two—Th—"

"I consent."

Five minutes afterwards, Dicky rushed down the stairs again, holding in his hand six bank notes, white and crisp, for five pounds each. Marion was alone in the empty room. He lost all the bounce he had put on with his late employer as he opened the door, and came in quite humbly.

"Miss Revel," he said, stammering, "I am very sorry. I know something about those money-lenders. I—I—have got a little money by me—put away in a stocking, you know. I've brought it to you. Take it, please, and let

me fetch all the sticks back again. It's only thirty pounds."

"Oh! Mr. Carew. But I cannot."

"You must, Miss Revel. You will, I am sure, to oblige me—no, not to oblige me; for the sake of your sister."

"But, Mr. Carew, why do you—"

"Because you—oh! it's for your own, Miss Marion. No, don't turn away. I know well enough what a distance there is between you and me. Dicky Carew is not blind; he understands more than people think. Suppose he has dared to love and respect you for three years, he has known all the time it was nothing but such love and respect as a servant may pay his mistress. God bless you, Miss Marion!"

"Mr. Carew, I cannot take your money. I cannot, indeed."

At that moment the door opened, and Mr. Owen appeared again.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I've got my money. Mrs. Candy—she's a good soul, though a little short of temper—advanced it out of the till on my Post-office bank-book. Here it is—twenty pounds. We can buy back some of the

furniture, at any rate. They have only got the right to take what will pay for the bill."

Dicky Carew patted him on the back.

"Good man," he said—"you shall give the boys a half-holiday for this. Now, Miss Revel, you've got enough to defy the money-lender and all his malice. Let us go together, Mr. Owen, and pay off the sharks."

But there was yet another visitor—Dr. Chacomb.

He entered in his quiet and self-possessed manner, shook Marion's hand slightly, and nodded to Carew.

"You here, Carew? Miss Revel, I am happy to say that the little difficulties are removed. The man will send back your things at once; and you will have no further trouble about the matter."

"We are deeply grateful, Dr. Chacomb."

"Not at all. The rascal abated half his claim directly he saw that he had me to deal with. He will place his men at your disposal, and you will only have to see that everything is put back exactly as they took it away. Good morning, Miss Revel; I am going down to Chacomb to-

morrow; but I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you next week."

"Now," said Dicky, with fallen face, when he was fairly gone, "I sha'n't have the pleasure of getting your things back for you. I've sold my revenge for nothing but a speech. What a pity! What a pity!"

"And now," said Mr. Owen, grumbling, "I shall have to take back this money to Mrs. Candy. Miss Marion, do keep it for me."

CHAPTER IX.

THIS was Marion's darkest hour. When the bill of sale was settled, and the furniture brought back again, she had a letter brought by a ragged little girl from her disreputable pensioner, Mrs. Spenser. It was written in her usual strain—half of command, half of entreaty.

"Come to me at once, as soon as you can. The boy is very ill."

Marion obeyed the letter. This was a case in which not even the doctor, a kind of *deus ex machina*, could interfere in her behalf. The thing had to be faced by herself. It was her own secret.

The woman apparently had time, between the sending of the letter and Marion's arrival,

to recover her spirits. She was sitting at her table as usual, at her work, singing to the boy, who lay on his mattress, propped up with pillows and a bundle of clothes. His childish face, with its bright, questioning eyes, looked profoundly pathetic to Marion: it seemed as if his intellect had been stopped at the age of six or thereabouts, when he might have been a child of great mental promise and vivid imagination.

He had grown thinner in the few days since Marion last saw him; his cough was worse, and he sank back from time to time upon the pillows. The St. Vitus's dance was more frequent and more violent.

Marion came in unobserved. The boy's mother was singing an old nursery song with open doors while she worked. Rickety Jem nodded his head, drummed the floor with his stick, and tried to join in the chorus.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?
Oh! no, pretty maid, I cannot marry thee,
'Cause I've got no coat to put on.
So she went upstairs to her father's chest,
And she brought him a coat of the very, very best,
And the soldier put it on.

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?
Oh! no, pretty maid, I cannot marry thee,
'Cause I've got no boots to put on."

The boy got up, and tried to brandish his crutch as he limped up and down in time to the tune. It was a very feeble effort, for the rickets seized his limbs, and he fell back again, with a cough that seemed to tear him to pieces, upon the bed.

Marion remembered the old song—but in a place how different!—and the singer too.

The boy, recovering from his attack, cried out for more, just like a child.

"'Soldier, soldier!' Go on, mother, finish the song."

"She went upstairs to her father's chest,
And she brought him boots of the very, very best,
And the soldier put them on."

"Now the last!" cried the boy, impatient—"when she's given coat, and hat, and boots, and all."

"Soldier, soldier, will you marry me,
With your musket, fife, and drum?
No, pretty maid, I cannot marry thee,
'Cause I've got a wife at home."

The boy drummed on the floor and laughed

at this simple ditty, singing it over and over again in his piping voice.

"You remember that song, Marion, of course," said the woman, half defiantly, as she looked round and saw her visitor.

"Yes," she said, simply. "How is the boy?"

"Tell Marion Revel how you feel, Jem, my son."

"Better," said Jem—"aint I, mother?"

"He was very restless last night. That was why I sent for you. I want him to have a doctor. This morning his cough is not so bad as it was. At least, I don't think so."

Rickety Jem looked up in Marion's face with his weird smile. The likeness to Adie struck her more, as the features grew thinner and the eyes brighter. She kissed him on the forehead, and the boy shrank back, half ashamed. Like an Australian savage, he hardly knew the nature of a kiss.

"He's so thin," said his mother. "What can I give him to get his strength up again? Show me your arm, my boy."

He drew up his sleeve, and showed an arm about the thickness of Marion's finger—a thin

stalk of an arm, a mere transparent strip of fragile bone.

"Don't look at me like that, Marion Revel," said the woman. "He has had plenty to eat—it isn't that. I have not spent the money in drink. Nothing at all has come into the place except tea and milk. The boy has had it all. It's more than a month since he went out of the house, and was run over by the cab. He's never been the same child since. But always the best of boys to his poor mother, isn't he, Jem? Always the best and most affectionate boy in all the world."

Jem laughed.

"Some of the boys got no mother. Some of the boys got mothers as beats them. Some of 'em are afraid to go home, even in the winter. One boy ran away, and went to sea."

"His mind runs on his companions still," said Marion.

"They've been his friends since he could walk. He knows nobody else. He has been to no other school."

Marion sighed.

"When I go out again," the lad went on, "the

boys 'll ask me where I've been. I shall tell 'em I've been having milk and eating oranges. Ah! when shall I go out again, mother? I'm tired of coughing, and the pain in my back won't go."

"Soon, my boy, very soon now," returned his mother; "when we have some warm weather—when the summer comes again."

Marion's eyes filled with tears.

"Let me bring a doctor to see him."

She had written to Marion expressly to ask for a doctor. Now she suddenly turned from her purpose.

"What good? I know, Marion Revel, what you think. It is quite true, and it is coming. I have felt it coming for four weeks. Lie down, Jem, dear, and have another orange. If you lie down you will not feel the pain so much. There, my child, now you will be comfortable. Go to sleep, my boy—go to sleep, my darling."

The boy complied, and closed his eyes as if asleep.

"He lies like that, quiet and still," murmured his poor mother, "for hours. It's to make me think he is getting well. But he is not. Oh! he is not. I know it. And what shall I do

without him, Marion? What shall I do—Hush! —speak low. It's the great mercy of God, after all, that he should go—isn't it? I don't mean to me, because there is no mercy left for me; but for him, for the boy. It's better that the child of shame and guilt should die, and the sooner the better. What is before him if he lives?"

"And for yourself"—Marion took her thin hand in her own—"for yourself; can you bear to let the child go?"

"Bear!" she replied, with a great and sorrowful cry. "Ask me if I can bear this miserable life? What have I not borne for fourteen years? Do you think there is anything that such a woman as myself cannot bear? Oh! Marion Revel"—she burst into low and bitter weeping —"*he* ought to forgive me; he would forgive me if he knew what my sufferings have been. Not to take me back—never that; not to let me kiss my son and my daughter—his children and mine—never that; not to take his name again, no—not that; but only to be near him, and to feel that he has quite forgiven me. Your mother will be his wife, Marion, *there.* She was a good

woman, like yourself. Some people are born good, and it is no merit of theirs; but if I could only be his servant!"

"My dear, believe that he has forgiven. Be quite sure of that; do not doubt. Ask God's forgiveness too."

"That's not what I think of," she said, truthfully. "It is of *him* that I am always thinking."

"You must think that the boy will only go before."

"Where am I to go, mother?" cried the boy, who caught at the last words. "Not to the hospital. Don't send me to the hospital. There was one of the boys went there—him that used to turn Catherine wheels alongside of the 'buses—and they cut off his legs, and he never came out again. Died, he did. Then they cut him up to see what he was made of."

"No, not to the hospital," said Marion—"to a much better place; to a place where there is always happiness."

"And oranges?"

"Yes; finer fruit than you ever dreamed of, Jem."

"And lemonade, and milk?"

"Everything is there; and for anybody. There are fields and flowers."

"One of the boys came from the country, he did. He's always talking about fields and flowers."

"That is it, Jem. You will go to the country —a much better country than this."

"Mother, why are you crying? Sha'n't we go together?"

"Yes, boy—yes," she answered. "Where you go, I go. God shall not separate us, shall he? Marion," she added, after a pause, "you will forgive me, won't you? I have suffered so much that I am not always mistress of myself. I know how good you are. There is not one woman in ten thousand such as you, that would come to see a woman such as me. Do not think me ungrateful. See, I try to keep myself from drink. I am always sober now."

"I do not—only—only—do one thing that I ask you—teach this poor child a single prayer."

She drooped her head, and answered nothing. Only she did not refuse.

"Jem," said Marion, "you have a Friend whom you cannot see, but who sees you. Would you

like to ask that Friend to help you? Listen, and say after me."

The boy listened, and learned.

"Now you know it—say it aloud. Never doubt that this great Friend hears. Do not be afraid to say it every morning, and every evening. When you are in pain, and when you are awake at night, say it for yourself, and for your mother, and for me."

The boy said his prayer. He understood little enough what Marion taught him as yet; but he obeyed, being a docile child, and unaccustomed to such gentle ways as Marion's.

While he prayed, his mother, her head bowed between her hands, crouched at the foot of the bed—like a slave, who longed, but feared, to meet her Lord.

CHAPTER X.

MR. OWEN spent the remainder of the day lying in wait to catch the author of the mischief, Mr. Frederick Revel, with whom he wished to exchange a few words.

He caught him in the evening, as the unhappy young man was stealing back, expecting to find a "desolated hearth," with perhaps his sisters, and his poor little wife, sitting on the bare boards, weeping.

"Come with me, Mr. Revel," he said, leading the way to the empty school-room, where he took up the position of vantage, by sitting at his desk—Fred standing before him like one of his boys. The wrinkled face of the pedagogue was full of trouble; he stammered and hesitated.

"I've said nothing about it yet," he began,

without explaining what *it* was. Fred knew what he meant. "Nothing about it. But I have seen what is going on. Now, sir, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Fred shook his head, implying that he had really very little to say.

"I told her at the beginning of it all that you were a worthless chap." He went on: "She said you were the soul of honour. I told her you were a lazy chap; she said you were longing to find work. I told her you were eating your head off; she said that you were pining away and getting thin with sorrow at finding nothing to do. That was a month ago and more. What have you found to do since?"

"I have been unlucky, Mr. Owen."

"No, sir!" taking up the cane, and bringing it down, *emphasis gratiâ*, on the desk, with a crash that made the young man jump in his shoes—"no, sir! you have not been unlucky, you have been idle. You have gone on eating your head off at your ease. You have not tried to find work. You despise a man who does honest work—you despise ME. Good heavens! I dare say you despise your own sister. Solomon says,

'The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' *You*, to despise honest work!—you who have spent your days in a billiard-room! You have borrowed money till your old friends will lend you no more; you have never looked for work at all; and, to crown all, you have gone to a money-lender—a blackguard money-lender, who dared to insult me when I asked him a civil question—and got advances on your sister's furniture. When the scoundrel came with his bill of sale, and seized the sticks, where were you? Ran away—ran away! He robs his sisters, this man, and runs away; and then he dares to ask my girl, *my* Winifred, to marry him!"

The situation was such that the young man did not even dare to resent this plain speaking. It was true; and, moreover, the speaker was his own father-in-law.

"Was it your fault that the furniture was not sold at once? Has your sister Marion got to thank you that it is all brought back safe?"

"Brought back! How? By whom?"

"By Dr. Chacomb, if you must know," growled

the schoolmaster. "Not but what there were others willing and anxious to help."

"I am glad," said the culprit, humbly.

"You ought to be sorry. But what have glad and sorry got to do with the business at all? What are you going to do about my girl?"

It was a most unfavourable opening for announcing his marriage. It was as if an Eton scholar, just under the rod of Dr. Keate, was about to choose that moment for announcing his passion for the head-master's daughter. The news must be postponed.

"It's all true," he replied—"quite true, and I am—but what does it matter, as you say, about glad or sorry? I mean to keep my promise to your daughter—to Winifred."

"Do you?" cried the peppery Welshman, in a tremendous rage. "Will you? Here is condescension! Here is an affable young fellow for you! He brings misery on his sisters; he keeps them poor; he refuses to work; and now he tells me that he is ready to keep his word with my daughter—the honest daughter of an honest man. Why, sir, if it depended on me, I would knock your head off your shoulders.

I would refuse to let Winifred see you any more. I would turn you into the streets to starve. But it does not depend on me, unfortunately. There are your sisters to be considered, and my girl. The devil of it is, that Winifred loves you; and I can't get over that. Sooner than grieve my lamb, she should marry a murderer, if I thought the murderer would love her in return. But don't think it is an honour you are conferring on our family, Mr. Revel; because, I tell you plainly, I looked for better things for my daughter."

"I suppose," said Fred, grandly, "that you wanted her to marry some miserable little counter-jumper."

"I did. I looked to see her marry an honest man—counter-jumper or not—who would make his living as God should order, try and do his duty, and not be ashamed of his handicraft. It's a poor sort of family pride that sets up one trade over another. And you—what trade have you got at all? What are your expectations, sir?"

"I have none," said Fred. "I hope, however—"

"You had better give up hoping. You have

no expectations, no money, no friends, no trade, no skill, and you propose to marry my daughter! Truly, you are the most hopeless man in all this wide world. Remember that you will have to show you can keep her first."

"You do me wrong, Mr. Owen. I give you my word that I should not be ashamed of any trade. I would do anything, if only to show you and Marion that I am not so helpless as you think me. I only want an opportunity."

"In that case," said the schoolmaster, "the boys meet here every morning at nine. You shall come here to-morrow, and work my classes for me. There's your chance."

Fred turned pale. It was, to be sure, a chance. But what an opportunity! Work, in his vague brain, meant, at the best, a gentlemanly lingering in an office for a few hours in the day; at the worst, writing at leisure, in an arm-chair, by a comfortable fire. But work of the kind proposed by Mr. Owen was too terrible. Assistant, usher, understrapper in a wretched London academy—teacher of small tradesmen's sons! Possibly, considering that Mr. Owen's cane was not wholly intended for ornament,

he would be expected to take his part in its use.

"Well," said the schoolmaster, "what do you say? I give you an opportunity. You shall work here as my assistant for a month, without pay. Then I will try and get you a place in a larger school, where they will give you—well, I dare say you might get as much as thirty pounds a year to begin with, board and lodging for ten months in the year thrown in. You'd be a made man then," he went on, with a queer light in his eyes—"wouldn't you? Thirty pounds a year, and all found. Walk out with the boys on half-holidays; look after them in play-hours, and— Eh? why, in a few years, you might be thinking of marrying my girl. Come, Mr. Revel, it's the best chance I see for you. You are an Oxford man, too —though you haven't taken any degree—and that always counts for something Do you know Latin?"

"I—I—yes—of course I do."

"Then construe me this piece. Stay a moment. Where's the translation?"

He opened a Horace, one of the books that

stood for show on his shelves, and finding a place at random, took down Francis's translation to keep himself safe with. Out of Cæsar, Mr. Owen's Latinity was shaky.

"Now then—

'Quî fit, Mæcenas, ...'"

"I am rusty. I have forgotten my Latin and Greek."

"Well, there are other subjects — algebra — Euclid."

"I never learned mathematics at Oxford."

Fred spoke as if mathematical science belonged to a lower stratum of society than his own.

"Then we come down to geography and history, arithmetic, English, writing."

"It's no use. I can't be a schoolmaster."

"Mr. Revel, if you want to marry my daughter, you've got to work. Now go. Make something of yourself, or give up my Winifred."

"What am I to do?" he asked, almost piteously.

"I will tell you." The schoolmaster bent his face down within a couple of inches of Fred's, and said, in mysterious tones, "Go abroad."

"Go abroad?"

"Aye, go abroad. The world is wide, and there are places where they want strong arms. Find them out. Go there, make your fortune, and then come back here for Winifred."

Fred made no reply, but left him.

The diplomatic schoolmaster nodded and winked when he was gone.

"That was a good stroke," he said. "Now we shall get rid of him."

Why should he not go abroad? Anywhere abroad. There was nothing for him to do in England. He was only a drag upon his sisters. He could not help his wife. Why not leave wife and sisters for awhile, and try his fortune somewhere?

And then his sanguine imagination began to picture an Arcadian scene of prosperity, plenty, and happiness.

He walked away to St. Martin's, to meet his young wife, gathering at every step fresh ardour of resolution.

"Winifred," he began, eagerly, "I have something very serious to say to you. No, nothing wrong. There has been a row at Lowland-

street; but it is all hushed up now, and smoothed over. A bill of sale—nothing you would understand—an old debt of mine. That is not it. I have seen your father."

"Oh, Fred, did you tell him?"

"No. I was afraid to tell him after the shindy. He let me have it, on his own account, for idleness. I will spare you, my dear," he said, with commendable feeling, "the details of the interview. For your sake, I bore it all. And the end of it is—"

"What, my dearest? Oh, tell me—tell your wife."

"The end is, that I must go abroad."

"With me, Fred? Not, and leave me at home?"

"For a time, Winifred, I fear I must. See, dear, it will be better so. You do not know, my love"—he spoke naturally and simply—"the dangers I run in London. My dear, a man told me the other day that the only end for such a life as mine was to become a billiard-marker. Your father says I am ruining Marion. I see no prospect of getting even the smallest appointment. I have been running after shadows all

this time. Now, be brave, my girl, and let me go."

Winifred tried to be brave, but she could not.

"Abroad—across the ocean, somewhere—I shall find an opening. I have made it all out clearly, Winifred. I make a clearing in the forest, run up a log hut—only a shanty at first. I live in the woods, planting, sowing, weeding, and all the rest of it. I shoot the wild game for my dinner. And as soon as I have made a nest—in about a year or so—I shall write to you to come out too. Think of leaving this dingy London, and living in the most beautiful climate under the sun, with the most delicious fruits, no need of money, and no lack of good things. Above all, away from all this—bah!—this struggling mass of people, fighting and quarrelling for their ill-gotten gains."

He spoke enthusiastically, as if he had been all his life pining for a return to the Saturnian rule.

"But Fred—oh, Fred!—is it real? Will you be able to do this? Do you think you can really and truly work in a field like a labourer?"

"Out there there is no such thing as gentle-

men"—Fred's notions of America, it will be seen, were confused—"a man may take off his coat and work without losing caste. Besides, it is the desk work that I hate; that is horrible and detestable. In the open air, in the sun, where there are no billiards, and where you want no money—there I could work. Yes, and you should never be ashamed of your husband."

"Fred! as if I could be ashamed!"

"You must let me go. I will be a burden on Marion no longer. Who knows what dreadful thing may happen next?" He was still thinking of the billiard-marker's prophecy. "My old life is finished, Winifred; let me begin a new."

This man a "worthless chap"? This man as idle as a gipsy? This man as prodigal as a Guardsman? Every pulse in Winifred's veins cried "No."

"We shall not be parted long, love," the young hero went on. "I will write by every mail. You will try to keep your heart up; you will not forget your husband—will you?"

They were at the door of the Lowland-street lodgings.

Fred was in earnest for once. He would be

rid of the whole trouble, and try fresh fields. All weak natures, when anything goes wrong, want to go away, and begin life over again. Some years ago when there was a crash in the ice, and some half-dozen men were missing, it was found that a few—those who knew how to seize an opportunity—had taken advantage of the accident to disappear in the flesh, leaving debts, wife, children, and other impedimenta behind them. Fred proposed to do exactly the same thing, only he did not intend to desert his wife.

"I *must* go," he said—"I must go. I feel choked. It is as if I was being dragged down, and was dragging Marion and Adie, and you, my poor little girl, too. See, love—here I cannot shake off the feeling that I am a gentleman. I could not bear that one of the old Oxford set should see me at some miserable work. Out of England it will be different. Come, dear, take my watch and chain—the chain is sham, because I had to pawn the real one long ago; but the trinkets are gold, and so is the watch. It is all I have to give you. My dear—my dear—"

"You are not going now, Fred; not now—not to-night?"

He held her tight in his arms, kissed her twice, and was gone.

He walked straight to Dr. Chacomb, told him what he proposed to do, and asked for the loan of enough money to pay his passage to any port in the States by the first steamer.

"There is some stuff in the fellow, after all," said the doctor. "Of course there is. How could your sisters have a brother with no good at all about him?"

When Fred shook hands with the doctor half an hour later, his eyes were soft, and his voice a little husky—

"I will send the letter to-night," said the doctor. "And—and—Fred, if I have been a little rude sometimes—that's right; you forgive me. Write to me when you get out; and depend upon it that I will look after your wife. Sly dog, sly dog! You will come home a man. Good-bye, and *bon voyage.*"

Fred's letter was to Marion. He told her what he had done. He wrote with his heart full of sorrow, and made no protestations. When she had finished the letter, Marion came to a postscript which startled her more than all the rest.

"P.S.—Winifred is my wife. I married her two months ago, and against her will, poor thing! And I made her keep the secret. Be kind to her, as you have always been the kindest of sisters to me."

Marion gave the letter to Adie, and crept downstairs to Winifred's room, where the schoolmaster, listening disconsolately, heard the sounds of weeping and sobbing. He knew, somehow, that they were crying for Fred, and it made him angry.

Then Marion came and told him all the truth, and would hear of nothing but an immediate and general amnesty.

"And it is my bullying," said the schoolmaster, "that drove him away."

She left her new sister in her father's arms. Winifred told him all, talking and crying, till she fell asleep, and lay there, dreaming that she was with her husband, all the night. Every time she moved, and murmured "Fred," a pang of rage and jealousy went through Owen's heart; but he fought it down, and greeted his daughter, when she awoke, with a cheerful smile.

CHAPTER XI.

"COME out, Chauncey, or I will do more mischief."

The voice was that of Mrs. Chauncey Chacomb. She was standing in the great hall of Chacomb, before the single door which led to the wing known as Gerald's rooms, with which this door was the only means of communication.

"Come out, Chauncey. It is six o'clock. Come out, and you shall have port with your dinner."

There was no reply.

"Chauncey," she went on, "I know you are listening on the other side. Open the door at once, or I will send Charles with a hammer to break it down."

"You can't—ho! ho!—you can't. The door opens your way, and I've barricaded it inside."

"Joe"—she turned to the doctor, who had arrived, and was surprised to find that his cousin had locked himself up for four and twenty hours, and still refused to come out—"Joe," she was in tears, "it isn't my fault. I have done nothing to him. How can I help it if he turned rusty?"

"Cannot you get in at the window?"

"The ground floor windows are all secured with shutters, and he has got a pistol, loaded. He says if anybody puts a ladder to the first floor window, he will shoot him dead first and himself next. Joe, what a fool I was—oh! what a double fool—to marry this wretched little lunatic!"

"Try him again. Speak softly to him. If you do not succeed, I will try. Now, Julia, forget that you are his wife—make believe to be his housekeeper again."

She laughed.

"I wish I was. Chauncey—I mean Mr. Chacomb," she said, in her sweetest tones, "dinner will be served soon. Will you have it sent in to you, or will you take it with me?"

"Neither," he replied. "I shall stay here.

I've got a box of sardines and a case of claret. I shall dine off them."

"This is dreadful," said the doctor. "Does he often go on like this?"

"No; but for the last week he has been very queer. I've got four men sleeping in the house, and I think he is frightened. He thinks they are watching him."

"Julia, I am disappointed in you. I thought you had more tact. Now, we *must* get him out."

"I can't. It's no use bullying me, Joe. If I had the patience of—of Moses and Aaron, I could not help flying out at him now and then. Is it my fault if he locks himself up? Can you say that I have ill-treated him? Have I beaten him? Have I starved him? Have I asked him for money?"

"No—no," said Joseph. "I hardly suppose you have. At least, not much. But there is such a thing as contrast. Now, the first Mrs. Chacomb, you know, was a lady—"

"And I am not. Well, never mind. If it was miserable here when I was housekeeper," she went on, "it is fifty times as miserable now I

am the mistress. No one comes to see me. I go nowhere. I have no money; but that is your doing."

"It is, Julia," said the doctor, with a smile. "I like to manage the Chacomb revenues myself. I have brought you the weekly allowance. When you choose to put the household on a proper footing, you shall have an increase. That's enough for the present."

"I wonder if a lawyer could force you to give me more?" she said, looking discontentedly at the coin.

"You had better try. I still preserve a few letters of yours, Mrs. Chacomb. It will not be difficult to prove that you used your position here to gain an ascendency over the weak brain of a lunatic, and forced him to marry you on the vague threat of doing him a mischief. Where will you be then?"

"Don't be cross, Joe. It isn't like your old self. Lord! I wish the good old days could come back again. Do you remember me as Perdita the Perfidious, at the Wells? You were a good fellow then, Joe. You hadn't been spoiled by getting a fine practice, and going

about to see countesses. You didn't sit down to a finicking pint of claret to your dinner. You drank all the stout and the port you could lay your hand to, in those days. You didn't snap up a pretty woman then for a word here and a word there. Ah! Joe, you were a very different man then."

"I was, and you were a very different woman then. Hang it, Julia, it's twenty years ago! You are Mrs. Chacomb, of Chacomb Hall, now —a very grand lady."

"Very grand indeed! Oh! if I had only known. What do you think my lord did the other day? Forbade my going out in the carriage—told the grooms not to take me out. When I ordered the carriage round, they laughed in my face. Do you call that being mistress of Chacomb Hall?"

"It was an extreme measure on the part of my cousin," said the doctor, twinkling. "I did not think he had so much pluck. Of course, you acquiesced meekly."

"No doubt," said Mrs. Chacomb. "Ju Cathnor always was a weak, easily-put-upon, worm-like thing in her younger days, wasn't she, Joe?

Wasn't she?" She danced up to her old friend with an airy flourish of her hands—a reminiscence of bygone times. "It's likely she'd acquiesce. I will tell you what I did, Joe. First, I dressed myself properly. Then I made my little maid call the grooms to the kitchen, and give them beer. (Beer is the real magnet for the male feet. Champagne, as you know, draws the feminine tootsicums.) Then I stepped out, and got into the carriage, and waited. In a few minutes my gentlemen came out, and harnessed the horses for their daily drive—little thinking I was inside. When we had gone two or three miles, I ordered them to put down the head, and drive me a good round. You should have seen their faces. When we got home, I let them have it, both of them. They won't forget the rough side of my tongue for a bit. And after dinner I let Chauncey have it."

"Ah! I thought we should get to the bottom of the barricade some time or other."

"It is not the slightest use in the world," she pursued, "nagging Chauncey. You get no fun out of it, and no satisfaction. He only opens his eyes wide, and stares straight before him, as

if he were looking at ghosts. And it isn't any good lifting your voice to him: he doesn't even listen. Always that far-off look."

"I'm glad you don't feel it necessary to lift your hand to him," said the doctor.

"I've done that, once or twice; but, Lord! it's boxing the ears of a man who takes no manner of notice. Many's the time I've boxed your ears, Joe—when you richly deserved it—till you've sworn again."

"Some people swear easily. It's a habit of which I have broken myself."

"Ah! the jolly old days, when we went to Richmond on Sundays, Joe—you, and I, and Jack ——. Well. So I determined to punish him. I got up and went straight to the Collection. I took half a dozen things called Roman lamps—you know the trumpery—and I brought them back with me. 'Now, Chauncey,' I said, 'I'll teach you to insult your wife.' Then I put them under my heel, and scrunched them up, every one."

"And then?"

"Then Chauncey shrieked as if he'd been killed, and ran away. It was last night. Since

then he hasn't come out, and I can't persuade him. You heard me try."

"We must persuade him. Go and fetch—stay."

He went away, and came back with an apostle spoon, a rusty spur, and one or two fragments of pottery.

"Now, we will have a little drama. Threaten to break the things to pieces."

She nodded. The time was half-past seven, and the evening had fallen. The great hall was empty and dark, save for the two figures and a single candle on the table. It was a long and lofty place, running the whole length of the house, with windows at the end. Originally it had been designed by the builder as a sort of state dining-room. Screens stood here and there, and the hall did not communicate directly with the outer door. But both the outer and the inner door were open. The two figures moving in the big hall in the twilight looked weird and spectral.

"Now, Julia."

"Chauncey, will you come to dinner?"

"No, I will not. Go away and leave me."

"Chauncey, will you come out, for the first time?"

No answer.

"Chauncey, will you come out, for the second time? Chauncey, if I ask you for the third time, it will be the worse for you. I have got in my hands a valuable silver spoon, with a label on it—out of the Collection."

"My apostle spoon—my apostle spoon!" he moaned, behind the door.

"That isn't all. I've got a rusty green old spur, which I can bend with my fingers. Now, Chauncey, if you don't come out at once, I will bend it and break it into little pieces. It's only rubbish."

"The spur of King Canute!" groaned Chauncey.

"And break the apostle spoon into fifty fragments. Oh! Joseph!"

For at this point of the drama the doctor seized her by the wrist, with a violence that was perhaps a little over-acting the part, and made her shriek quite naturally.

"Cousin Chauncey," he said, in his deepest tones, "what is this? Why do I find you locked up and barricaded in this way?"

Then arrived the very luckiest moment in all Joseph Chacomb's life.

For just then a strange face showed itself at the door of the hall, that inner door which led to the outer porch. A white face—a face bearded like a pard, full of expectancy and curiosity. Neither of the actors in the little drama saw it. Finding that he was unperceived, the owner of the face stole across the hall softly, and crept behind one of the screens. Then he listened.

"Is that you, Joe? Is that my cousin Joseph."

The voice of Chauncey sounded hollow and faint.

"It is, Chauncey. Open the door, and come out."

"Send *her* away first," he cried. "I only want to see you."

"Go to the dining-room, Julia," said the doctor. "Wait for us there. Order dinner. I will bring him out in five minutes."

She obeyed, and swept away, brushing the floor with her long silk train; and the doctor heard her ring the bell.

"At all events," he said to himself, "we shall have dinner. Now, Chauncey, make haste, and open the door. I shall be here till Monday morning, and you may trust yourself entirely with me, you know. Open the door, and tell me all about it."

There was a great drawing away of boxes, pieces of furniture, chairs, and other things, by means of which Chauncey Chacomb had effected his barricade. Presently, his steps were heard in the space which he had cleared, a chain was taken down with a clinking, locks and bolts were undone, and the squire of Chacomb appeared. Marriage had done very little good for him. When the Cambridge Don, who married late in life, was asked how he found the state of wedlock, he said that the breakfasts were better, but the dinners not so good. Chauncey Chacomb would have said, with truth, that everything was not so good. As a housekeeper, Mrs. Cathnor had been a pink and paragon. She kept the servants in order. She kept up the house. She regulated his expenditure. She looked after his comfort. She was submissive in appearance, and she ruled in reality. Now

that he had married her, all was changed. She ruled, and professed to rule. She had dismissed all the old servants, and could not bring herself to engage a new set. She had no sense that an old country hall should be kept up with a certain amount of state. Above all, she had neither fear, respect, nor reverence for the master of the place; and she bullied him.

He was very miserable to look at. Thin in the face, stooping, his right shoulder a good deal more raised above the left than it had been four years ago; his eyes closer together—half shut—with a thousand crows'-feet and wrinkles round them; and a general look of suspicion on him, which only cleared away when he saw that his cousin was standing in the hall alone.

He ran to meet the doctor, with hands outstretched, and an eagerness that was affecting.

"Joe," he cried, with a sort of sob—"cousin Joe, the only friend I have in the world, since Gerald went away. How glad I am to see you! How glad I am you came to-night!"

"Tell me all about it, Chauncey."

The way in which the poor creature clung to him struck the doctor with pity and remorse.

Of course, it is understood by this time that Joe Chacomb's better points were exactly such as to be brought out into full blossom and fructified, so to speak, by prosperity and the sense of power. Still, at no time had he been a stony-hearted man. Pity is an artistic emotion; it soothes the avenues to the brain and the more delicate sensations, just as soup prepares the way for dinner. Hence, so many marriages are founded on pity. Amadis the Invincible, Sir Bors the Lady-killer, are not bad fellows at bottom; it goes to their heart to see fair Melusine grow thin and pale.

"Cousin Chauncey, cheer up," said the doctor. "Let us be jolly, man. You can't undo what you have done, but we may make the best of it. We will go back to the old times, and have a bottle of port for dinner, shall we?"

Chauncey shook his head.

"I haven't enjoyed my glass of port," he said, "for four long years. I must not expect to enjoy it now. Joe, can't you persuade her to go away from me?"

"I might," said Joe. "Gad! I never thought of that. But I might. When would you like

her to go, Chauncey? I think she is best in London—everybody is best there. Of course, I should not let her call upon me, and should give orders not to admit her."

"Of course," said Chauncey. "So should I, if I could get rid of her."

"I will do what I can, Chauncey. Now, why did you barricade yourself?"

"She talks, she scolds, she sings, she—she boxes my ears, Joe. And whether she talks, or sings, or scolds, it is all the same; for her voice goes through me like a saw, and makes me see ten thousand devils. When I hear her at night, the room is peopled with faces—not all of them Revel's face, only a good many. Some have Marion's face; so that I am sure she must be dead."

"She isn't dead. Nonsense, I saw her yesterday."

"Joe, how the devil could I see her face with the face of her father unless she was dead? Now, answer me that."

"Upon my word, I can't answer you that. But Marion is alive, poor girl!"

"Her brother wrote to me last week for

money. He said they were starving. But she wouldn't let me send any. Now I remember, Marion's name was mentioned. Then she must have died since then."

Evidently, the poor man's hallucination was stronger than ever.

"Come to dinner, Chauncey," said Joe, with a shudder.

"Joe, you won't leave me, will you? Come and sleep in Gerald's room. I will have the little room. It will be very comfortable to wake up and hear you snoring. It is quiet—so very quiet, when the faces begin their long procession. Promise me not to leave me. Oh, I am afraid of her. Yesterday she broke into the Collection, and broke my valuable Roman lamps. To-day, she was threatening to destroy King Canute's spur just as you arrived. She's a dreadful woman, Joe—oh, a dreadful woman! I never knew that such women could be found. I have read of them, but I thought they only lived in novels. Joe, take her up to London with you—take her right away from me. Let me get rid of her. Oh, Joe! Joe!—what should I be without you?"

The listener, bending low behind the screen, heard and marked all this. As the two went arm in arm to the dining-room, he followed with noiseless step, listening still.

The dinner was as bad as when the doctor last visited Mr. Chacomb.

"Upon my word, Julia," he said, trying to get his knife through the joints of a large barn-door fowl—"upon my word, the state of your larder is too monotonous. We had tough fowl the last time I was here."

"We have tough fowl every day, I think," said Chauncey, humbly.

The listener had followed to the door of the dining-room, which stood open. The room was lit by four candles only, which formed an island of light in the midst of a great darkness. So dark it seemed to him, that he was standing in the doorway looking at the party, without the fear of being observed. Facing him was Chauncey, who sat at the side. At one end was Mrs. Chacomb, at the other the doctor—the usual order of things being reversed.

"Joe," said Chauncey, quite quietly, laying down his knife and fork, "give me a glass of

sherry, Joe—thank you. Yes, thank you, it is quite clear now. I told you that last night I had a great vision; quite a remarkable procession of faces passed my pillow."

"Aye, Chauncey, you did say something about it. You are like the prophet Joel. Julia, this fowl is disgraceful. Well, cousin, and what about the vision? Tell me what it meant?"

"They came trooping past me in thousands: an endless file of human faces without bodies—thousands of them, Joe. Every minute there would be a Captain Revel among them; then a Marion Revel—all dead people, you know. One face I missed among them, and I thanked God, because I knew that he must be alive; it was the face of my son—my Gerald. But now he is dead too—"

"Chauncey!" cried the doctor, "take another glass of sherry, and then go on with the wing of the fowl."

"Chauncey," said his wife, "if you talk like that at dinner, just when people are trying to be happy and enjoy themselves, after all the misery you've made me undergo on your account, I will come round and shake you. I declare I will."

"Manners, Mrs. Chacomb!" said the doctor. "Ladies in society do not shake their husbands. Nor do they threaten to do it."

She tossed her head, and poured out a glass of claret. There was no servant in the room, the little maid having retired to the kitchen, where the grooms were helping her to dish a very bad pudding.

"Now Gerald is dead, too," resumed the squire; "for I have just seen him."

"My poor cousin," said the doctor, "do be good enough not to talk in this creepy way. It's not pleasant at dinner. Take another glass of wine. Did you get the port, Julia?"

Chauncey, as usual with him, was staring straight before him; and, as usual, the others took no heed to the direction of his eyes. Then he set down the glass which he held in his hand, and half rose from his chair.

"Chauncey's worse to-night than I have ever seen him," the doctor murmured. "His wife has frightened him out of the few wits he had left."

"It's strange," the squire said. "The other faces passed away, but this one remains. Revel

only turned his sad eyes upon me, and disappeared; so did Marion—her eyes are like her father's. Gerald remains. I see more than his face—I see his whole body in the twilight. He is pale. He has grown thin. His beard is long, and his eyes are sad. He moves. He comes this way. Gerald!—Gerald! My son!—my son! Speak to me."

He threw himself forward, with his arms extended, and fell, face downwards, upon the table, with a fearful cry.

It was echoed by his wife, who turned her head, and saw the form that her husband had seen—which he thought to be a spectre.

"Father," cried the stranger, "it is no vision. It is your son."

But his father moved not.

The doctor was the first of the three to recover. He seized a light, and threw it upon Gerald's face. Then he, too, turned very pale—so pale that his friends would not have known him. Then he put down the candle, and said, very softly, as if speaking to himself—

"Gerald come back!"

"It is Gerald," the stranger replied; "and

more than thankful, my cousin, for the trust my father has in you."

"You know—what do you know?" asked the doctor.

"I was present just now in the hall. I listened—forgive me—I overheard all that my father said—"

"Wonder if he overheard all that Julia said?" thought Joseph.

"— and I thank you from my heart. You have earned my everlasting gratitude. Father, will you not shake hands with me?"

"Voices and faces—faces and voices," murmured the poor little squire, trying to look at things as they were. "I see them, and I hear them. Joe, tell me what is real."

"This is real, Chauncey. Your son is real. He who was dead liveth. I wonder if that's in the Bible," he murmured, softly—"sounds like it. The prodigal—no, the wanderer has come home again. Let us kill fatted calves, and drink—drink old port—wine of Shechem. Sit down, Gerald. Have you had dinner?"

Dr. Chacomb was nervous, and talked a little at random.

"Here is a tough old hen." He pointed to Mrs. Chacomb in his agitation of spirit. "Here is your new stepmother." He pointed to the fowl in the dish. "Sit down, and make acquaintance, and eat and drink."

Gerald bowed coldly to Mrs. Chacomb, and sat down. But he did not eat much, or drink either. The doctor ate and drank for everybody. The squire sat gazing steadfastly at his son.

"Gerald," he murmured from time to time, between his teeth.

Presently he got up suddenly.

"Joe," he said, "give me a sleeping draught. Make me sleep a long while. I haven't slept for a fortnight, and I don't know which are ghosts and which are realities. The room is full of ghosts now."

The doctor and Gerald took him to his own wing.

Mrs. Chacomb waited for them for two hours. Then she rose in a rage, and went to her own room.

Chauncey went to bed and to sleep. The

other two sat up and talked. Gerald told of his travels—how he had been stricken down by fever in Central Africa, and had been tended by faithful negroes. The doctor told how he had started the Hospital for Gout, and was now a prosperous man.

"And my father, Joe?"

"Your father's hallucinations are stronger than ever. That woman I sent down here as housekeeper. She made him marry her."

"Was it—was it all hallucination?" asked Gerald.

"Every bit. I was there. The man fell off the cliff. I have told your father so a hundred times, but nothing moves him. Nothing ever will now."

Gerald sighed.

"I fear I was hasty in going away. However, I have formed the mode of my life. I am going back again as soon as I have shaken off a little of this jungle fever."

"Back again? With all this before you?"

"Yes, my cousin. It is my fate, I suppose. Every man must work out his fate, eh? You are not four years in Africa without believing in

fate, let me tell you. Do you ever see the Revels now?" he asked—quite carelessly, Joseph noticed. "I must call upon them when I go up to town. That will be in a few days. You can give me their address, please."

He did not ask what they were doing, or anything about them, which was remarkable, the doctor thought.

Then he began to talk about his stepmother.

Next day, Mrs. Chacomb, with a great array of boxes, took the mid-day train to London. It is sufficient to say that she lives in considerable comfort and some splendour, but by herself, in a suburban villa at Dalston. Once a month or so, on a Sunday afternoon, Dr. Chacomb drives over to see her. She is a widow now, and entertains her friends with long histories of the splendours of Chacomb Hall, and her own great doings with the other county ladies.

When Chauncey awoke it was high noon. He was lying in Gerald's bed, and by him sat his son, in the flesh—no ghost at all.

"Gerald"—his voice was hollow, and sounded far off—"I have had a miserable time since you went away. Now and then I know that I am

suffering from hallucinations, but they come again. I know now that it is all a delusion. Think that it is so. Oh, Gerald, do not believe your father a murderer, whatever he may think himself! Ask Joe."

"I do not, sir. Trust me, I do not."

"Joe will tell you, Gerald. Remember, Joe has saved my reason—what little reason I have—and my life, too. Always let Joe do what he likes in this house. Give him money if he wants any. Remember, Gerald, it was Joe who saved your father from the madhouse."

Then he thought he should like to get up and see the Collection. The doctor had pieced together the lamps with cement, and he saw no change. Nor did he ever, at that time or afterwards, make the slightest allusion to the second Mrs. Chacomb: she passed out of his mind like one of his old dreams.

After a month or two he took to lying down, a habit which gained upon him. And now I do not think he will ever get up from his bed any more.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER Marion undertook the Hermit's commission, he began to exercise his privilege of coming to see how the picture progressed every day, showing an almost feverish anxiety about it. Not that he cared about the copy, which was his crafty pretext, but the society of the young ladies filled him with a delight unspeakable, after his long imprisonment. It was, to some extent, a return to the world—a very limited and humble part of it. Mr. Lilliecrip was one of those men who, like La Fontaine and Oliver Goldsmith, expand and show their sunniest side in the presence of ladies. He resembled those poets in no other single quality, being, as has already appeared, as untruthful as a Syrian, as boastful as a Gascon, as selfish as a Fakir,

and as cowardly as a Fantee. But the pleasure of seeing for half an hour a day these two girls, of talking to them, hearing the rustle of their dresses, watching the waves of their hair, breathing the same atmosphere with them, filled his life now with a delight quite new to it. He was attracted, too, by some strange resemblance in Adie's face, manner, and voice to one he had known many years before. Fancy an imprisonment—voluntary, but still an imprisonment—for fourteen long years, during which nothing beautiful in the shape of womanhood has been near the prisoner. Then imagine the opening of a door by which, while the captivity is maintained, its rigour is alleviated by the talk of young ladies. Then try to think with what a boyish joy, what beating of the heart, what pleasant excitation of the nerves, this Recluse would creep nervously down the stairs every morning, and knock at the door of the room which held those angels of a better world. He dressed with the greatest care. He manipulated his long white hair, letting it sweep back from his brow with the flow of an ancient Gallic warrior. He covered his long fingers

with rings. He decorated himself with diamond studs. He made up compliments, writing them out beforehand, and studying how to bring up the conversation so as to drag them in. He acted over again in his imagination what he had said in the morning. He even, in his ardour, neglected his dinner, and made for two or three successive days a repast perfectly simple.

The change in his life coincided with the severance of his connection with Mr. Carew. The rude, low-bred, and painfully true words spoken by his secretary gave his nervous system a great shock. To be sure, Dicky, whose manner was truculent and even threatening, had abstained from personal violence, a thing to which Mr. Lilliecrip had an almost sacerdotal objection; but his criticism put him, for the time, out of conceit with the Memoirs.

Men's imaginations take hold of strange forecasts. Mr. Lilliecrip, obscure in life, pictured to himself a posthumous glory equal to that of Mr. Pepys, and second only to Saint Simon. He was, so far, like Chauncey Chacomb, who desired to be remembered after death as the collector of the Chacomb Museum. The doctor, on the

other hand, was contented with the good opinion of his contemporaries. Their praise, he was wont to say, leads to pudding.

But what pleasure could a writer of Memoirs feel in work which even a common scribe and quill-driver like Dicky, his late secretary, declared was too stupid to be read, too clumsy not to be detected as an impudent forgery? Undoubtedly, too, it *was* a forgery; though, by the practice of long years, Mr. Lilliecrip had come to regard it as a genuine series of reminiscences. There are liars who have reached to such a point that they cannot speak the truth—imaginative liars; liars of principle, habit, method; liars who like to believe that they are telling the truth, who build a palace for their soul and live in it always, adding to it, decorating and improving it. Mr. Lilliecrip was one of these. Just now, after the rude assault of his secretary, the palace walls seemed too much knocked about for the place to be habitable, and he felt like one who has been turned out into the cold.

And so he basked in the sunshine of the first floor. He appeared every morning as radiant as Tithonus refreshed by kissing Aurora's rosy

fingers. He brought compliments with him—good old-fashioned compliments with a fine crusted flavour—these the girls laughed at; flowers, which they liked, and early fruit—things which no one can ever refuse. And yet, as he felt with irritation, he made no headway in their good graces. The man, callous as regards others, was morbidly sensitive about himself. He felt what was thought of him; he almost knew what was said of him. If he had overheard Adie's opinion of him, he could not have been more certain what it was.

This it was.

"Marion," said the young observer, "I don't like him. He was a gentleman once, I suppose; but I don't like him. He is never real. His compliments are foolish, and his pretensions ridiculous. Considered as a Hermit, he is a disappointment. Hermits ought to have dirty faces and to wear serge gowns, with nothing between that and their tender skins, to punish them for being hermits—the nasty creatures! Mr. Lilliecrip is dressed like a young gentleman of Regent-street. Lilliecrip, too—what a name! My dear, he has done something."

He did not impress her at all. She only laughed at his magnificent talk, and almost openly mimicked him. He saw that she criticized him. As he spoke, moved, and dressed *pour l'effet*, it was natural that he should be on the watch perpetually, to see what sort of effect was produced. He liked to walk up and down the room, a habit which his long years of solitude had given him, just as if he had been in the Zoological Gardens. At the table by the window Marion was at work with her water-colours; Adie in her chair, at work on some of her own devices. Between them he walked and talked, generally of himself; but always in a guarded manner, as if there was something to hide.

"My old friend, Lord Cardigan," he began once, naming an officer whose exploits the younger generation know only by hearsay—"my old friend, Lord Cardigan, once advised me seriously to cultivate Art as an occupation—of course, not as a profession."

"Dear me!" said Adie, in her flippant way. "That is a very interesting anecdote. Tell us another, Mr. Lilliecrip; and then I will try to

remember how I once sewed a button on my cuff."

"Ah, yes—very good indeed, my dear young lady, very good. It reminds me of poor D'Orsay's best days."

"Mr. Lilliecrip, what do you go about under false pretences for?" asked Adie.

"My dear!" expostulated Marion.

"I mean, of course, why do you live in a wretched house like this, where the world never comes?"

"Because the world never comes here," said the Solitary, with a sigh.

"I am sure I wish it did," Adie went on. "But the world is a very pleasant world to those who have money. You have money, I suppose, Mr. Lilliecrip?"

"Money, yes, and—and—rank," he added, as if the word dropped out unawares.

"Really! are you Sir John Lilliecrip, Baronet, or General Sir Arthur Lilliecrip, K.C.B., or Baron Lilliecrip, or Earl Lilliecrip, or the Marquis of Lilliecrip, or His Grace the Duke of Lilliecrip? You can't be His Royal Highness Prince Lilliecrip—can you?"

Mr. Lilliecrip made no answer to this sally, which visibly disconcerted him.

"Adie, dear," murmured Marion.

But her sister went on.

"Tell me why you wear that ribbon in your button-hole, Mr. Lilliecrip?"

He had assumed a slender scarlet ribbon, like that worn by the Legion of Honour in France.

"It is nothing," he answered, pretending to hide it. "A small personal distinction, bestowed upon me in 1848 by the Emperor of Austria, on the field of battle."

"Dear me!" said Adie, who did not believe a word of it. "I like to hear about battles. Tell me the history. Did he make you kneel, and knight you on the spot?"

He gravely shook his head.

"Pardon me; it is an affair of history. I can hardly, even to gratify a lady's desire, tell the story without revealing—revealing what it is best to keep concealed.

"Can you not understand, young ladies," he went on—by this time he was standing in the window, where a reflection of the sunlight from an opposite window fell full upon his face and

head, and lit him up with a kind of aureole—"can you not understand, without putting me to the pain of explaining, and thereby uncovering what it has been my fixed resolution to conceal, the sad history of a deceived and disappointed life? Suffice it that I found, at the age of forty—late, you may say—the world a mockery, its pleasures a vanity, the profession of friendship hollow, the vows of women false."

"I cannot understand that at all," said Adie; "that is, speaking for myself. I find the world's pleasures charming, and I believe women are always true. Marion, dear, can you understand that the pleasures of the world are vain? You see, Mr. Lilliecrip, we have known so few of them that it would not be fair to judge. When I have gone on a little way farther, say half as far as you, I might possibly agree with you; but at present I can only say that I do not understand it at all. It seems to me stagey to talk in that way."

Mr. Lilliecrip was staggered. The girl's way of catching him up in an elaborated sentence put him out. He leaned against the window for a moment, and considered.

There was a woman in the street below, staring up at the window, with haggard look. A woman in rags—a disreputable woman. She came with hurried steps into the street; but when she arrived at the door of No. 15, she hesitated, stopped, and crossed over to the other side. Then she walked up and down, gazing with all her eyes at the windows of the first floor—those of Marion's lodgings.

It was a bright morning; the sunshine was reflected across the street upon one of Marion's windows. There, presently, this unquiet watcher —for she walked up and down, talking to herself, clenching her hand, and clutching her wretched shawl round her wasted figure—saw a head appear, clad in long, white hair, and standing out in the sunshine as if it were a silver head set in ebony.

When she saw it, she started; then she looked again, bending forward and straining her eyes, as one who wants to catch at every vantage point of sight. The head turned a little, and she saw the full face for a moment; the figure straightened itself, and she saw the slope of the shoulders.

Then, like a mad dog, she ran up and down the kerbstone in misery, with eyes full of rage and terror.

And lastly, as if she had no more control of her limbs, she shrieked aloud, and running across the street, dashed open the door—which was, as usual, left ajar—and rushed up the stairs to Marion's room.

"Let me try to make myself clearer," Mr. Lilliecrip was going on, in those clear, calm tones which convinced Dicky Carew against his better knowledge that the man was truthful. "You are both far too young and inexperienced to feel the disappointments of a man who was for twenty years in search of a career. Wealth and rank; family connections and—if I may say so--hereditary intellect; accomplishments and—if I may be allowed to speak of it—personal distinctions—the Victoria Cross, the Iron Cross, the Eagle of Russia, the Cross of Maria Theresa, are a few of my rewards. All these things, dear to most people, to me were vain. What are they, indeed, compared with a disappointed heart? In diplomacy, I looked for truth and honour, and found falsehood and treachery; in war, I

looked for courage and found cowardice; in friendship, I looked for devotion and found self-interest; in love, I looked for fidelity and found betrayal. Everywhere self, everywhere luxury, everywhere interest, everywhere falsehood. England, my native England, where is the ancient virtue gone?"

"That sounds very pretty," said Adie. "But suppose you had started like me, without expecting too much. As for myself, I look for nice people, and I pray for money in order to put myself in their way."

There was a step outside the door, which Marion heard, and, lifting her head, waited for a knock; but none came. Had no one spoken, they might have heard a loud, quick breathing outside. But they could not guess the wild passion that held the woman there motionless till she could beat it down low enough to find her voice again.

"It was my leading principle through an active life," went on this pompous moralist, "to seek out Virtue. Rarely have I found it. At last, after repeated trials and disappointments, I resolved to quit the world for which I had

toiled in vain, and endeavour to find in solitude such happiness as my meditations alone might give."

"Meditation and mutton cutlets," said Adie. "I have heard they go well with claret. It all sounds like a piece of an old novel."

"Young lady, forbear to scoff at a man who has seen Courts, who knows the roar of battle, who has lived in cities, and who, with all his experience, can proudly say with Bayard that he is a knight *sans peur et sans reproche*."

He delivered himself in measured speech, raising his figure to the full height of six feet two as he spoke, and folding his arms with an attitude which spoke volumes. He swelled out, too, like the frog in the fable, and looked bigger.

Adie felt abashed at the rebuke and at the aspect of the godlike man. Still, in her frivolous way, she might have answered, had not the door been flung open. There stood the woman —the same whom she remembered seeing with Marion—standing tall, defiant, and threatening. Her eyes—bright blue eyes, *the same colour as Adie's*—were fixed upon Mr. Lilliecrip. She

neither moved nor spoke for a space. Only her right arm slowly lifted, as if mechanically. Madame Rachel, a gipsy woman in a rage, a Hindoo whose husband has eaten her cakes, an Arab woman who is having an altercation with another lady of the same camp—alone could equal that gesture of unbounded and unstudied rage. Her lips were parted; her nostrils dilated; the flush of wrath upon her sunken cheeks filled them out, and made her look ten years younger.

Marion started from her chair, and placed herself between the woman and her sister.

"You dare to come here!" she cried—"*here*, of all places in the world?"

"Hush, Marion Revel!—hush!" the other said. "Don't be afraid. It is not to you I come. Tell me—tell me—why is *he* here? What is that man doing in this room? My God, what fresh misery is he preparing? Marion Revel, tell me before I kill him!"

At the voice of the woman, at the name she spoke, Mr. Lilliecrip seemed to shrink together and collapse. He did not change colour, because his ghastly pallor could not well grow

whiter; but he grew suddenly six inches shorter of stature, and ten years older. His hair seemed to lose its silky flow, and fell over his face; his eyes grew crowsfooted, his cheeks wrinkled, his hands trembled. The youthful coat he wore looked like some horrid mockery.

"Tell me what he is doing here, Marion Revel —if not for your own sake, tell me for hers."

She pointed to Adrienne, who cowered with terror behind her sister.

"Revel!" murmured the man, with chattering teeth.

"Ay, Revel! You ought to know the name well—no one better. What have you to do here—and with *his* daughters? Yes, Captain Revel's daughters. And who am I? Do you remember me? Do I ever cross your thoughts? Am I changed? Am I wasted, worn, and miserable?"

"You are Carry."

The answer came like a whisper from dry and trembling lips.

"Carry! Yes, Carry! Marion, do you know now who this man is? You do not. I see you do not. Perhaps you cannot even guess. But

you know—oh! you know what I am; and he is the cause. He is the wicked cause, and I am the miserable, wretched victim."

She passed, in her swift way, from lamenting to threatening.

"I told you, Marion, that I should meet him some day. I prayed for this, and that makes the second prayer answered. I told you I should have my revenge."

The man who looked on, shivered, shook, and trembled, trying to stop the torrent of her words.

"Come upstairs, Carry. Not here. For God's sake, come away with me."

"Marion," the woman went on, "I came to tell you that the boy is dying. Better so—better so. I will have my revenge by the death-bed of his son."

He shrank back, as she stepped towards him, with a pitiable terror and horror.

"I did not know," he murmured—"I did not know who they were. Miss Revel, I give you my word of honour—"

"His word of honour! His word of honour! Come with me. Both the parents shall be at

the bedside of their dying child. That is proper —that is right. The boy shall give you his blessing before he goes."

Marion, bewildered as she was, felt pity for the poor wretch, so utterly broken down, and at the mercy of this woman.

"Have pity on him," she said. "He is old —and—and—"

"Marion Revel, you are a fool. Shall I nurse my revenge for fifteen years, and lose it at last? Shall I suffer want and misery, shame and disgrace, and forgive him when I meet him after all this time? Come"—she seized him by the arm—"come!"

Then she turned, and saw Adrienne clinging to her sister, frightened. Suddenly her whole face changed. She let the man's arm drop, and, with a bitter cry, threw herself at the girl's feet.

"No, Marion—suffer me—only this once in all my life. Never again—oh! mo—never again! Both your hands, my pretty—both your hands, my darling; both your hands for me to hold and kiss—and kiss. Oh, Adrienne—little Adie —little, little Adie!—do you remember, Marion? And she never knew, did she?—never knew.

What shall I say to her—what? She is as beautiful as the day; she shall be as happy as a princess; she shall have every blessing that the Lord has to give her; and she shall be—she shall be—good."

She went on like a madwoman, crying, talking, and kissing Adie's hands all the time. The girl yielded passively. The tears stood in her eyes; but they might have been tears of surprise, sympathy, or anything. She understood nothing, and suspected nothing. The miserable Hermit stood irresolute. There was a moment when he might have made his escape, when Mrs. Spenser was crying over Adie's hands. He lost that moment, looking at the woman with eyes of foreboding. All the uprightness was gone out of the man; he seemed shrunken into the semblance of a terrified and beaten cur. When it was too late, and her passion had somewhat spent itself, he bethought himself of the door, and stealthily moved in that direction.

Mrs. Spenser sprang from Adie, dashed away the tears from her eyes, and seized her prisoner once more with a clutch of steel.

"Marion," she whispered, quickly, "I have

not told her—never tell her. Make up something. Forgive me. Come, sir, come—we have something to see together."

She dragged him, resistless in her wrath, from the room.

"Marion," said Adie, tremulously, "what is it? What does it all mean? Who is she, Marion?" the girl repeated. "Why did she kiss my hand? Why did she look so wild?"

But Marion made no reply. Her cheek was pale, and her lips dry. She *knew*. She knew without needing to be told, all that it meant. The man with the silky, white hair—the man whose face had inspired her with a distrust at first sight, was he who had brought ruin and wretchedness upon her father's happiness.

And the woman?

She soothed her sister as best she could. It was her great comfort, for herself, that Adie had no suspicion, not the slightest suspicion, of the truth. She was only frightened and curious.

"Is she mad, Marion?"

"Yes, dear, yes. She will not come back again. Adie, you are not afraid to be left alone, are you? I must go and look after that

poor creature. Never ask me who she is, dear. Never speak of her, or think of her again. If you are nervous, go and sit in Mr. Owen's room. He is in the school, and you are quite safe there. Don't be frightened, dear. The poor woman has had a terrible life, and a fearful punishment for sin. The wretched man was, it appears, her tempter. Do not think harshly of her, Adie. I must go to her lodgings."

Marion found the unfortunate Hermit planted by the pallet of the boy, just where Mrs. Spenser placed him. His hands hung down his side; he looked sometimes at the woman, sometimes at the boy, and sometimes at the wretched room.

His face brightened when he saw Marion.

"Don't let them murder me," he moaned. "I will make expiation; I will pay something every week."

The mother was attending to the boy, still with her wild eyes and shaking limbs. She seemed to take no notice of the man, but if he moved she placed herself at once between him and the door.

Marion turned to the boy. He lay back upon the pillow, his cheek pale and thin, his frame

wasted. Death was written, so plain that even his mother could see, in his bright and fixed eyes. His lips played with a thin, sweet smile, and his face wore the intensified, peculiar expression of absolute vacancy, which yet was not quite idiotic, but even pleasing. He did not belong to the world—he never had belonged to the world. There was no tie with humanity, except that with his mother, which it would pain the boy to break. There was no thought of the next world to excite in him the tears of terror, or those of a grateful trust. He was an infant still, although of fourteen years, on whom the ills of the world had passed over innocuously, because he did not know they *were* ills. He was that creature whom the Arab has ever regarded with respect, and the Christian, until the last few years, with loathing—a boy with half a brain. Nature had been very kind to him. He was to live for fourteen years only, and then to die. She gave him the gifts of gentleness, sympathy, and love.

"Look at him, Marion," said the poor mother. "Do you think he is looking easier?"

"Jem," said Marion, kneeling beside the child,

"you know me, don't you? You have seen me here before."

He smiled. He would have nodded his head, but was too weak.

"I know," he murmured. "I told you the hymn—

> 'Adama Neave they turned him out,
> 'Cos he knocked the apples down.'

Mother, give me an orange. I say"—he turned feebly to Marion—"don't you wish you was ill? It's jolly to get oranges all day long, and all night too. I should like to see the boys again. There's one boy—tell him—"

He stopped and coughed.

"Yes," said Marion. "What shall we tell that boy? He is a friend of yours."

"Tell him," said Jem—the words were ferocious, but the meek manner of utterance redeemed their ferocity—"tell him that he owes me for two *Globes* and an *Echo*, and if he won't pay me, I'll cut his liver out. It's twopence altogether."

This seemed to Marion a poor way of starting for the next world: but the boy's childish face belied his sanguinary threats.

They watched—the three of them—while he had another fit of coughing, which seemed to tear him in pieces. Presently the fit ceased, and he sank back. His mother held his hand, and began, always with one eye on her prisoner, a sort of trembling monologue.

"When he was only a day old," she said, "I wished I was dead, and the child as well, till I felt those little fingers at my breast. Marion, I never felt so with the other two—not quite so. It was for this boy that I gave up my husband, and my home, and—and—you, little Marion, that I loved, only not my own. It was for him—for him. Ah! and he will never know what I gave up. He will never learn the madness of his mother and the wickedness of his father."

Mr. Lilliecrip moved uneasily, and in the direction of the door. A gesture from the woman stopped him, and he stood at the end of the bed, looking miserably, not at the boy, but at the woman who had found him out. His dignity was gone; his figure was bent; his bearing was cowed. It seemed impossible that so great a change should happen in so short a time.

"Look at him, Marion. Look at this miserable creature. He has not even the common courage to brazen it out. And it was with him—with him—that I ran away from the best husband in the world, and the dearest children—with this man. Look at him well. He was handsome, after his kind. He could do things. He wore his uniform gallantly. He was not so clever as my husband, and I was not afraid of him. I was a fool—oh, heavens, what a fool I was!—and he persuaded me.

"My boy," she went on, after a while, "who was your mother?"

He was breathing slowly, and with difficulty. The cold dews rested on his forehead, and his eyes were closed.

"She was a lady," he replied, slowly, and with pain.

"And who was your father?"

"He was a gentleman."

"What else, my boy?"

"Oh, hush!" said Marion. "For pity's sake, spare him. The boy is—"

"What, Marion Revel—what? The boy is going to have a quiet sleep; and then, perhaps,

he will get better. Say, my boy—what was your father?"

"A scoundrel! When I meet him, I will kill him."

The man at the foot of the bed trembled in all his limbs.

"He was more than a scoundrel," said his mother. "Plenty of greater men are scoundrels. He was a coward—a convicted coward. He was a disgrace to the cloth he bore, and to the army he belonged to. He refused to go—the only officer in the service who ever did it—he actually refused—look at him well, Marion!—to go out on trench duty. They tried to hide it in the regiment; but I knew it—oh! I learned it. Only think, Marion, that for this miserable creature I lost my all!"

Marion was wiping the lips and forehead of the dying boy, and hardly listened to the poor frantic woman.

"Jem," she whispered—"Jem, dear boy. Say after me, my boy. Say, 'Our Father.'"

"That's my father—I'll kill him," the boy replied, in sullen words. "When I see him, I'll kill him. Mother says I am to."

"Say, then—'God help and forgive us every one.'"

"God help and forgive us every one," the boy repeated, dutifully. "What is your name?" he asked, feebly.

"Marion."

"I'm Rickety Jem. Mother!"

His mother seemed stupefied. She sat stupidly gazing at her boy, trying by some superhuman effort to realize the full bearing of things. But she could not. It seemed like some dreadful nightmare. The years rolled away. She was with Marion, but Marion was a little girl. She was with this man, but he was a brave and gallant officer. She was—but no—the dream would go no farther.

"Mother," said Jem.

His senses swam about him. His eyes and lips lit up for a moment in a smile.

"One of the boys—" he began.

But he stopped short, laid his cheek on Marion's hand, and ceased to breathe.

Only Marion noticed that the boy was dead. But in a minute the mother's heart misgave her, and she stooped to kiss the boy. Then, with a

bitter cry, she fell upon the body, kissing it a thousand times in her agony.

When Marion looked round again, Mr. Lilliecrip was gone.

He had slipped away at the first relaxation of the woman's watchfulness. He crept noiselessly down the stairs, and he fled. The first thing that occurred to him was that he ought to get a hat; for Mrs. Spenser had dragged him through the streets hatless, an object of pity and derision to the world. He had his purse in his pocket. Provided with this necessary, he turned east, and, with furtive steps and much looking behind him to see if he was followed, he began a pilgrimage to some place—he knew not where—where he might be safe.

He marched, with downcast eyes and stooping figure—a strange figure—drawing the eyes of all after him, through the crowded streets. He was unused to walk abroad for so many years that he ran against people, got over crossings by a kind of miracle, drew upon himself the imprecations of cabmen and the warnings of policemen. But he kept on. He was so terri-

fied that he could think of only one thing—the best way of escape, and only one way—escape to a foreign country. He would go down to the docks; he would take the first ship which was going to sail; he would go to America. Other purpose he had none—only to escape from those dreadful eyes of the woman he had wronged, from the memory of the scene he had just witnessed, from any future consequences that might arise. We do not, unhappily, repent of our sins; we only dread the consequences.

Then he found himself at the docks, and further flight seemed, for the moment, impossible.

He went to a hotel—there are some good hotels at the East-end of London—and ordered a private room. It was getting on for evening. He ordered dinner as well. And then he sat down, and began to think.

"It was an awkward position," he said—"most awkward. I do not know that I can remember a more remarkable situation in any novel. The old love—she—the old love, and actually her daughter, with the step-daughter—elements, if one had only gone a little farther, of an excel-

lent French novel. Devilish unlucky thing her finding me out! And most disagreeable business that in her lodgings. However, it has forced me to leave my retreat. I will go back to the world. Not London—no, not there. In some place where I am not known—where there can be no chance of my being found out again, where the name of Lillingworth has never been heard."

He rose abruptly, and walked up and down the room.

"Curse the Crimean war! Curse my own folly in going! I might have sold out—lots of fellows sold out. I might have exchanged—lots of fellows exchanged. I might have come home on urgent private affairs—lots of fellows did. But I must needs go in for glory. And if I had done—if I had obeyed orders, I might have been snug, and been a general with a reputation by this time.

"Poor Carry! she's gone off terribly. Fancy my ever being in love with that little doll. I suppose I must have been once, else I shouldn't have run away with her. I was devilish afraid Revel would call me out. He didn't. Why didn't he? He wasn't afraid.

"And that's his daughter!—that splendid beauty; that glorious girl, with the deep brown eyes, that go through a man like a gimlet. Gad! and if it had not been for the cursed woman's interference, she might have been mine. We would have gone to Italy, she and I together, and practised Art. We would have lived at Spezzia—ah! I know it. I was there once with—with one of them, and looked over the blue waters of the bay, and drank the Chianti wine. Oh, what a chance to lose!"

He rang the bell.

"Waiter. If you have any curaçoa, give me a small glass. Dinner at six, if you can. And a bottle of Piper's Sec, if you have any. None of your sweet stuff. No, not a pint—a whole bottle.

"I am devilish low to-night. This curaçoa is not dry enough, but it is better than nothing. Poor Carry! she's like a devil to look at. Women are, when they go off in that shocking way, and neglect their dress.

"Hang her! Why should I trouble my head about her at all? What is she to me, or I to her, now? It is all past and gone. Let me forget the past. I am fifty-five years of age.

I have ten years more of enjoyment before me, and then ten more of care and misery. I will go to America. If I don't like it, I will come back to Europe. Waiter, let me have dinner as soon as you can. I shall sleep here; and—waiter, get me a telegraph form."

He telegraphed to his lawyers; went out to the docks, hard by; found a steamer—the *Triton*—going to sail at twelve the next morning; returned to his house; had a good dinner; bought a novel, and read it with great enjoyment; went to bed, and dreamed of Marion Revel.

Not a thought of the woman he had ruined, or of the wrecked boy, his son. The woman was one instrument out of many which had subserved his selfish purposes. Why should he feel for her?

The next day he was steaming down the Pool, on board the *Triton*. In his pocket were letters of credit. In his hand was another novel.

He strolled forward. In the forecastle, a steerage passenger was sitting—a handsome young fellow, whose face struck him with terror, for that also was the face of Carry.

"Good God!" he cried. "Can I never escape her?"

And hurried back to the after-deck. His enjoyment was gone.

For the young man was Fred Revel, his fellow-passenger.

While Captain Lillingworth—we may as well give him his real name—was drinking brandy and water, and laughing over the novel, Mrs. Spenser was wandering up and down the streets. Not in search of him—he was not in her mind at all, save as some refrain to a song, or as a song which gets possession of the brain, and keeps singing itself over and over again, always in discord with the thoughts that pass backward and forwards.

Presently she wandered down to the Embankment—unconscious where she was, or how she got there.

She was past thinking—she could only remember. Her life passed before her in easy stages, beginning with the brief courtship, when the grave young widower asked her—her, the girl who thought of nothing but balls—to be

his wife, and made her believe that she was clever.

"I wasn't," she said. "I was only silly—only silly."

Then she thought of her marriage. That took her a long time, because it was a happy thing to think of. Then she remembered the life in London, and at Portsmouth, where her husband got a ship. Then the quiet life in the country, while he was on the Mediterranean. Then the birth of the boy. Then the captain's return, and the coming of the little girl; and then—then—ah! then!

She was tired. There were no seats. The Embankment was deserted, because it was a rainy night. She went and sat down on the steps that overhang the water. The tide was rushing up through the arches of Waterloo Bridge before her with a loud swirl and sweep, tearing past the granite wall by which she sat, foaming against the steps, rushing inland, as if to escape some pursuer. There were lights beyond the river, which were reflected in the water; and as she looked across, there seemed to stand out upon the black water a face

which the poor distracted creature knew too well.

It gave her a shock at first; but in a minute or two she grew accustomed to the sight of it.

And then she began to grow rational.

"My boy is dead," she began, speaking to the phantom. "I have been very miserable—almost starving, except for your daughter, who is the best woman in all the world. Forgive me. I have never been happy for a single day since I did it—never once. Oh! forgive me. I found him out for what he was the day after I left you. I knew then—but it was too late—what I had given up. I was so silly—so silly; and you thought I could understand when you talked about books. Oh, God! I was so silly! And I got tired and cross because you would not see how stupid I was! And then he came, and then —oh, forgive me! Husband—say you forgive me!"

She stretched out her arms. The waves were flowing over her feet, but she felt nothing. Something seemed to lift her from the cold stones on which she sat, and to lay her softly in the water, which bore her swiftly—the face

beckoning her always—past steps and granite walls, under the dark arches of the bridges, by barges and steamboats, rolling her over and over, beating her face and washing her limbs, carrying her, cold and insensible, to the land where her husband had long forgiven her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE doctor came back to town thoughtful, but not, on the whole, depressed. It was true that the rightful heir was come back to his own. That was bad for himself and his succession. On the other hand, it was by the most blessed—by the most providential—arrangement of time and circumstance that the young prince should have arrived in the very nick of time, while Chauncey's demonstrative gratitude was in open evidence. There was very little fear, after this, that he would ever have to give an account of his stewardship at all; or, if any account, then such a one as would be best in his own interests. Two courses were open to him. He might simply declare that the Chacomb revenues had been spent on the Chacomb estate; or—it

was an alternative of some moral importance—he might tell the actual truth. He might say, "I have received the rents. I have kept a careful and accurate statement of all incomings and outgoings. I have seen that my cousin was looked after, and the place properly kept up. I have borrowed four or five thousand for my own purposes, for which I am ready to give interest, and to pay it off in a reasonable time. And the rest is all lying in the bank, or invested in the funds, in my name, *as the trustee.*" No legal documents; no nasty binding conditions; nothing but the word of a gentleman and a cousin.

"And, by gad!" he said, after an hour's cogitation in the train, "there is nothing in the world like honesty. I will write to Gerald when I get back to town, and send him the real statement."

This he eventually did, with such heightening of favourable details as even the goddess herself, fresh from the well, could not avoid. The result was as satisfactory as he could wish; for Gerald in person assured him that he valued his services to the owner of Chacomb at far more than the small sum (this remarkable young

man called it "the small sum") which his father had lent him—the doctor was careful to set the facts so as to make it appear that everything was done by permission of the squire, after careful consideration—and that no demand would ever be made upon him for the interest. Travellers and colonials, when they come home to England, are apt, as is well known, to be free of money, not rightly knowing its value or the difficulty of getting it. No doubt Gerald has learned better by this time.

The accounts which the doctor roughly drew up in his own mind—he knew the value of a correct statement, from reading Balzac—formed, when set down, a remarkable record of honest dealing. There was, first, the sum total of the rents for four years—a trifle of fifteen thousand pounds. From this sum was to be deducted the expenses of keeping up Chacomb—amounting to no more, with the reduced establishment, than fifteen hundred a year. That left nine thousand pounds. Now, of this sum he professed to have borrowed four thousand, and invested the rest. He had not, it was certain, embezzled, defrauded, made use of trust money, or done any of the

things by which men sometimes come to grief. He had simply—being a self-appointed trustee, answerable to no one, and acting in an inofficial manner—taken the liberty of borrowing some of the money, and investing the rest to what he considered the best advantage. And he had prospered greatly—so greatly that, although to repay the advances he had taken to start himself on his successful career he would have to sacrifice nearly all his earnings; yet he felt that he could do it, with a sure confidence that a few years more of work would put him in a position to retire from active practice. He might, too, and did, charge in his account for all those journeys undertaken in his cousin's interest.

The moral of this novel, as, no doubt, everybody has found out—it is absurd to append a moral in set terms—is that prosperity, and not adversity at all, is needed to develop the higher virtues of mankind. Some people have foolishly taught that self-denial and maceration are the only virtues. Rubbish! The most delicate flowers are fostered by the warmest sunshine. Generosity, measured by a sense of justice, prudence, thrift, common sense—all these fair blossoms are

produced by prosperity; and they are nipped by the cursed east winds of ill-fortune. In the old days, the doctor borrowed, spent, gave, lent, and scorned the qualities which make collective man strong. In this his wealthy time, he was actually proposing to charge his cousin all his journeys to Barnstaple and back. Now the virtue of thrift is very great. It makes England what it is. And it is possessed far more largely by the rich than by the poor.

It is not to be disguised that he was strongly tempted to evade the moral obligation of truth, and to enact the part of the unjust steward. Gerald's return was, in itself, an act at which he might fairly show some indignation. He had so long been irresponsible, that it was almost intolerable to resign his guardianship. And, besides, he had so accustomed himself to regard the silence of Gerald as indicating his death, that the rulings of Providence appeared a personal injury. It must be marked, as a clear advance in the moral nature of the doctor, that he shrank from the temptation as a dishonour; whereas, in his days of adversity, the unregenerate times, such a temptation might—one is not quite sure

—*might* have been considered from the standpoint of risk. But, when the train rolled in at Waterloo terminus, the doctor's brow was clear, and his resolution firm. His brow had smoothed itself out, and he had resumed his ordinary aspect of calm and thoughtful prosperity.

But there was another person to be considered. How should he act to Marion?

He dismissed Gerald and the accounts from his thoughts, and turned them in the direction of Marion. The doctor had at least one gift—that of being able to shift his mind. As with all clear-headed men, his subjects arranged themselves in pigeon-holes. Marion and Gerald were together in one, separate in two others; Chauncey and his housekeeper together in another; Gerald and the future auditing of accounts in a third. And so on.

Marion. She had to be told of Gerald's return. Should he tell her?

It seemed as if a crisis of his fate was approaching. For four years everything had prospered with him. If he borrowed money, it returned to him with interest wherever he invested it. If he started a speculation, it suc-

ceeded. If he wrote a book, it sold, and brought him credit. He was carried for four years along the tide of fortune, almost without effort of his own, save to guide his craft. All around him he saw the barks of other men—dismasted, rudderless, foundering, even keel uppermost—at best, making slow and uncertain headway, like a Thames barge when the flow is well-nigh spent. And now—the heir returned, the girl whom he had hoped to marry lost to him, and the borrowed money all to be repaid.

He resolved to see Marion that same evening.

He dined at a restaurant—things looking a little brighter after dinner—and drove home to Adelaide-street. Among the letters lying on his table, which he tossed over to be read the next day, was one which he seized and opened.

"I had forgotten that matter altogether," he said.

The letter was from a well-known artist.

"I am glad to tell you that your *protégée's* picture is accepted, and will be, if I can manage it, well hung. Come to the private view and see it, if you can find time. My opinion of it

is vastly improved. There is force in the conception; and, if some of the drawing is not too firm, it is correct. I do not think that the young lady will make a great artist, but she has gifts. The picture will sell. When you dine with me next, tell me all about her."

"By Jove!" said the doctor. "If the news had only arrived before Gerald's return. Perhaps it is not yet too late. Gratitude is a strong passion with women; as for men, they mostly wonder what it means. I will go at once."

He went, taking the letter with him, and found Marion alone, playing in the twilight such old music as she remembered — reminiscences which brought peace to her anxious heart.

She looked up as he entered, with those deep eyes of hers, which always went straight to the doctor's heart. Adie's eyes were larger and brighter, but they never moved him—they were too bright and shallow.

"I have brought you news," he said.

"Is it good news, Dr. Chacomb?" she asked, with a little laugh. "It is such a long time since we heard anything good."

"Yes; it is very good news. I have a letter from ——, the Academician. May I read it to you? No—take the letter, and read it yourself. Shall I light your candles?"

"No, thank you. I like to sit in the twilight. And I can read it by the light of the street gas."

She took it to the window; and when she brought it back to the doctor, he noticed that her eyes were full of tears.

"Poor Fred!" she murmured. "If this had happened a week ago, perhaps he need not have gone abroad."

"Nothing ever happens when it ought," said the doctor, thinking over his own affairs. "People and things always arrive just too late, or just too early. If it's an even chance, as actuaries tell us, when a thing happens, I don't understand why it always happens wrong. We must not build too much upon the picture, Miss Revel. You have got into the Academy—that is a great thing. We will hope you will sell your picture, and a great many others. But all the pictures are not sold."

"No. I understand. Only"—she turned a

face which looked, in the new light of happiness and hope beautiful, even more than with the beauty of youth—"only, let me hope. Oh, Dr. Chacomb! do you think they will abuse the picture in the papers?"

"That's quite another thing. Art critics are perhaps the worst people of any that pretend to do work. I've known lots; and I never knew one—not one—on whom I could depend for a good judgment of a picture. They get up the slang—that's easy enough. You have got to find the proper adjectives. If you criticize a portrait, say it is 'wrought for strength and brilliancy.' Lug in the words arbitrary and self-assertive. Write that the artist has created difficulties in order to conquer them. If you criticize a landscape, you must have delicacy, neatness, fertility. Nothing is so easy as to go in for Art. Do not worry your head about what they say. And as to that, I can get hold of some of them."

"Oh, but I should like an independent judgment."

"That is just what you shall have. That is to say, no one's mind shall be set against you.

Remember that the Art critic has first got to praise his own friends. When these are cracked up, he has got to bully his enemies. After these are well slashed, then come the general mob of painters, to whom he is indifferent. All I shall try at, will be to guide one or two of these gentlemen into the right groove for admiration."

It always grated on the girl's mind, this constant assumption on the part of Dr. Chacomb that everything in the world was done for some personal motive. He spoke out of the depths of his own knowledge of evil; she out of her belief in good.

"I will leave it all to you," she said. "How pleased Adie will be! And, oh! Dr. Chacomb, how grateful I am to you for all your kindness!"

She half held out her hand, but withdrew it again with a blush, which the twilight of the room prevented the doctor from seeing.

He was silent for a moment. For a great battle was raging in his soul.

"Marion," he began presently, and in a strange, hoarse voice—"I have worked for you, not without hope of a reward. You know me now. I do not pretend to be what I am not.

My life has been that of most adventurers. Pirates and buccaneers in all ages live in much the same way. They fight, drink, sing, gamble, and make love—those who live outside the world, and do not work in the usual grooves. I was no better than any of them—perhaps worse than most. But I passed through it without harm to my name; and for four years I have left the ranks, as you know. And I love you."

She made no answer.

This great, strong man, who had as much passion in his soul as any young fellow of five and twenty, seemed to be taking possession of her, whether she would or no. She trembled.

He stood over her, as she sat upon her music stool, his arms half open, as if for her to fall into them; his face, she could feel, looking down into hers; his eyes lit with that strange light of love which she had seen once, and only once, before, and remembered ever after.

"Marion!—I feel as if before to-night I only loved you a little. Now, when I feel that I may lose you altogether, I love you with all the strength of my heart. Have pity on me!

"When I asked you six months ago, you must have laughed to think what a half-hearted wooer I was. Because then I thought you safe, and now you may be snatched away from me. Remember, Marion, that it is I, and no one else, who has loved you all this time. To take away hope would be to take away the whole happiness of my life. Have pity!"

She did not answer.

"Marion, you *must* take me. I will not go away from you till you promise to be my wife.

"Oh! my dear"—his voice sank low—"my dear, who could watch you, as I have watched you, brave and strong, working for the others, always contentedly, and not love you? Who could talk with you, day after day, and read in those eyes of yours their truth and honesty, without loving you? Good heavens! could I—*I*—who know all, go away for years, and come back, forgetting almost your very existence? Marion, love me, too, a little."

The doctor had his chance, but he threw it away. Marion was strangely moved by his sincerity—mesmerized a little, perhaps, by the impetuous current of his eloquence. She might

perhaps have yielded, and engaged herself to Joseph Chacomb, but for the unfortunate allusion, covert though it was, to Gerald's return and Gerald's faithlessness.

She caught his words, and started to her feet, seizing him by the hand.

"Dr. Chacomb," she cried, "tell me what you mean! Why am I no longer safe? Why do you talk of losing me? Who is it that has gone away and forgotten? Who—who—who has come back?"

He did not answer.

She held him tighter; she cried and sobbed hysterically; she implored him to tell her. As she wept and entreated, the doctor's face, could one have seen it, exchanged its passionate eagerness for a look of pity and sympathy, which suddenly ennobled it. Was all this fidelity to be in vain? Was this sweet remembrance of a brief love passage to be smothered and marred? Was this loving and faithful heart to be tossed aside like a worthless weed? It seemed too cruel. His own passion vanished as he saw the quiet, self-possessed girl shaken out of all reserve by the news that her lover had returned; his own wrath

at the dashing of the cup from his lip was calmed when he saw her joy, and thought of her coming misery. For of one thing he was very sure—as sure as he was that Marion could never love himself—that Gerald no longer thought of her.

He soothed her, stroking her soft hair with his hand, as one would soothe a child.

"Hush, Marion!—hush, my child! Do not sob, and I will tell you all. Gerald has returned."

"Oh!—Gerald!—Gerald!—Gerald!" she cried, falling on her knees in a passion of weeping. "Oh, my love, my sweetheart! He has come back to me. Oh, God be thanked!"

"Forgive me," Joseph Chacomb went on—"I only saw him last night. He returned unexpectedly. He is at Chacomb with his father. I came here to-night to ask you once more if you—"

"When will he come to see me?" She cared nothing for his explanations. She even remembered nothing of his passionate pleading. She could think of nothing but that Gerald was returned. "Tell me what he said, and how he looked, and everything. Sit down, dear Dr. Chacomb. Let me put your hat on the table for

you. You are always so kind. Will you have candles? Tell me all about it—exactly as it happened. Let me picture it all clearly in my own mind."

"He is well, but has been ill with fever, and looks pale—older, perhaps, as you would expect; and certainly much graver. To be sure, there is not much to laugh at in Chacomb Hall just now. He asked particularly for your address, which I gave him. He will come to London shortly, and, of course, will visit you immediately."

"Perhaps he will write," said Marion. "There may be a letter coming for me now. But then it will be better to see him. Did he send no message, Dr. Chacomb? Surely, one little word."

"My dear young lady, how was he to know that I should arrive here to-night; and as for messages, he will bring them all himself."

"That is true," Marion replied, thoughtfully. "He will come here, and we shall talk over the dear old days: of Comb Leigh and my father; the little cove where my father kept his boat—did I ever take you for a sail in our own boat, Dr. Chacomb? She was the neatest little craft, papa used to say, along all the coast of North

Devon. Then there were the woods, where we used to wander when we were children. In the spring there were the birds; in the summer you could find wild strawberries; and always there was something to be seen and found. Gerald knew the woods as you would know a printed book. Oh, what we shall have to recall! Why, the past four years will seem just like a bad dream, when he sits here, and we talk about dear, dear Comb Leigh. The good old days! —they can now come back, can't they? But we may make some new good days, and they may be better still." She stopped, and her eyes filled again with tears. "Dr. Chacomb, I am foolish; forgive me. The memory of—of those things always makes me cry. Adie was too young to remember it all so well as I. And how shall I thank you? What shall I say to you? What can I do to show my gratitude? I will tell Gerald. Yes, I will tell Gerald. It is all I can do. You were the only friend we had in our trouble. You came and helped us; you lent poor Adie money; you got my picture in the Royal Academy—oh! Gerald will thank you, too."

She seemed to have forgotten that, five minutes before, the man was passionately praying her to forget the past, and to marry him.

"Forgive me, Marion," said the doctor, struck with contrition. "Tell Gerald any kind thing you please; but do not tell him that I tried to win you away from him."

"Oh, no—oh, no," she laughed and cried. She was *folle*—foolish in her joy. "All that is past shall be forgotten—all except kindness and sympathy; those we can never forget, Gerald and I, never. They will last with us all our lives. Dr. Chacomb, thank God with me that Gerald is returned."

"I would rather," thought the doctor afterwards, "have considered prayerfully a thanksgiving for the fact that he could not return any more."

"Will he come to-morrow? Will he come in the evening, do you think? Could Fred meet him at the station? No, Fred is gone—I forgot that. How shall I meet him? What shall I say to him? Shall Adie be here?"

"Miss Revel," said the doctor, solemnly, "do not let Adie be present when you see Gerald

first. You have never told her of your engagement, and how it was broken off—but just begun. Do not let her be with you. I will take her out in the afternoon, and bring her home to you in the evening, after you have seen him. Will you do this?"

"Will it be best so?" she asked, eagerly. "Do what you think fittest and best for me, doctor—you are always right. Perhaps we should meet alone. We shall have much to say. I shall tell how we have suffered, and what you have done for us. He will tell me where he has been, and —and—oh! I do not know what I am saying, I think. It is all so strange—so strange."

"Where is Adie now?"

"She is with Winifred Owen, downstairs, trying to comfort her. Winifred has lost her lover, too. It was Fred, poor girl! She has married him secretly."

"Do not tell her yet. Tell her nothing—not even of the Royal Academy. You shall go with me to the private view, and see your own picture. Tell Adie that, if she will trust herself with me, I will take her out to-morrow afternoon. You can let me give her a new

dress, as a reward for the picture, can you not?"

She took his hand, and her tears burst out again.

"I pray only that you may be happy, Marion," said the doctor, with a softened heart—"there is nothing else for me to hope for. And, Marion, if not in one way, there is another. Tell me, if Gerald is not what you hope and expect, if—if—"

"Ah," said Marion, "there is no *if*. I know Gerald. It will be long to wait till to-morrow evening; but what is that compared to the four years we have been parted?"

"Be brave, my girl," he murmured.

They shook hands. Her cheek was bright; her eyes were dancing with happiness; her lips were trembling. Never, in all the promise of her happy youth, had Marion looked so beautiful.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN the great Atlantic liner, the *Bismarck*, homeward bound from New York to Hamburg, ran into the little steamer *Triton*, outward bound from London to Quebec, and that famous collision ensued which furnished material for such long and complicated litigation, it was Fred Revel's lot to be on board the smaller craft. Once resigned to that unlucky chance, he had reason to be thankful that when the disaster occurred he was on deck, and in the bows. The accident, as was fully demonstrated by the evidence, happened the Lord knows how. It was a clear, still night at the end of April. The water was smooth, save for a little choppy sea, which made no difference to a ship, and would have mattered little to a wherry. There was fine starlight, if

no moon. The ships were on an even keel. It was long after the time of "all lights out," and some of the passengers on both vessels were still lingering on deck, loth to go below and exchange the air of the sea for that of the cabin, when the lights showed that two vessels were nearing each other. Then—but at this point the evidence was entirely contradictory. The passengers and crew of the *Bismarck* all swore that the *Triton* suddenly changed her course, and steered, as if purposely, athwart their bows. The few who survived from the *Triton* swore positively that the big ship put her helm hard a-starboard, and ran them down, with malice and deliberate intent to destroy.

Fred Revel's evidence to this effect was considered perfectly worthless. Also, he was unable to write a graphic account of the calamity, or even to give a verbal description. All he knew was that they were run down, without —as it seemed—time to steer out of the way; that there was a sudden grinding and crunching of beams, a rush of water, then a cry of drowning men, a shriek of the women from their cabins—and that was all. For the

Triton went down like a stone, with all on board.

The disaster happened a few miles off the Cornish coast, and there was, of course, a rush of correspondents to the place nearest the scene, to write up the details of the "tragedy," and then collect the narratives of the survivors. Of course, too, there were pictures in the illustrated papers showing the sinking of the ship—with, in those sold for a penny—scenes in the ladies' saloon as the ship went down. Of course, there were letters from correspondents indignant, correspondents sarcastic, and correspondents calmly philosophical. Heraclitus and Democritus both have their innings at such articles; and, what with the sham tears and the sham derision, we manage to make the worst out of calamities which give us at first a comfortable thrill of horror. One man wrote out an elaborate system, which occupied a whole column of the *Times*, and appeared in leaded type. He said that sailors had only to provide themselves before going to sea each with a life-saving belt, which might be purchased of Messrs. Catch, Chance, and Co., provided with a waterproof

bag, in which were placed, in separate compartments, biscuits, preserved meat, cigars, lights, a spirit lamp and portable tea pot, a pound of best Souchong, a flask of brandy, a pistol to fire at sharks, a rocket or two, and a chair to sit down in the water when it was desirable to change the position. This in case of wreck. As regards passengers, they would take not only the patent belt sold by Catch, Chance, and Co., but also the patent gutta percha boat, manufactured by the same benevolent firm, combining at once the portmanteau, shaving apparatus, a bed, a mast and sail, Rob Roy cooking apparatus, and a small carronade for firing signals. Thus equipped, a whole family, the writer stated, might get ashore as easily as did the Swiss Family Robinson in their tubs, which, every one remembers, were lashed together by planks, Tommy being placed in the centre to prevent him getting into mischief. Further, with a view of preventing collisions, there was to be a grand division of the sea—ships going one way to take the North Atlantic, and the other way the South, and so on, and so on; with a hundred other patent inventions. It was beauti-

ful, and only wanted sailors to be machines to be perfect. That is where all the systems break down. There is so much of humanity in things human. Philanthropists, religionists, social reformers, all the world of hobby-horse riders, break down through not considering this great fact. Have we not seen a great cause shattered, and the strongest Ministry of the day go to pieces, because its leaders forgot that the nation was made of men, and that the men are like the butcher's famous beefsteak, inasmuch as they may be humoured but cannot be drove?

A grinding up of iron ribs as if they were the bones of a partridge, a heeling over of the deck, a mighty wave of black water rushing in from all quarters—that was all Fred Revel knew of the calamity. The whole of the tragic details, afterwards graphically described, were lost to him—perhaps because his berth was forward. He saw and heard nothing of the poor ladies rushing from their cabins, and falling at the captain's feet; he saw nothing of the captain himself, standing with folded arms on the broken bridge. Heroism, cowardice, resignation, faith, despair—all these things, which appeared in the daily

papers, had no place in his memory, when he came to remember. He could think of nothing but a great horror, the swift destruction of the ship, and the sudden rush of black water. It was like a dream.

Everybody owned that the *Bismarck*, when the mischief was done, did her duty manfully. She steamed right over and through the vessel, whose stern she had cut in two, and kept way on for three hundred yards or so. Then she lowered the boats, and stopped the engines, being alive to the necessity of action. She picked up half a dozen sailors, who were floating about, and then the boats, seeing no one else, returned to the vessel; and she went on her way, little the worse for the accident, the captain swearing in undisguised disgust at the stupidity of the other ship, and chiefly afraid that his licence might be suspended.

But the boats did not pick up all.

When Fred Revel returned to a consciousness of himself, and had done fighting his way upwards through the whirling waters, which rolled and eddied over the sinking *Triton;* when his head emerged above the surface, and he was

able, like Neptune, "to look out over the main, and raise his head in majesty above the summit of the waters," it was a black prospect that he discovered. Floating near him were two oars from a deck boat. These he seized with such thankfulness as the dying man may hear the respite of his sentence, and partly resting on them, partly paddling, began to consider what next to do.

First he kicked off his boots; then, with a little manœuvring, he pulled off his coat, and let it go; then he picked up two more floating oars, which made four—almost a raft; and then, while he was binding them all together with a rope extemporized of his braces and his neck tie—a feeble line, but sufficient for his purpose and a short voyage, unless bad weather should come—he tried to realize the position.

He never saw the boats at all. In his evidence at the inquiry, he declared that, so far as he knew, the *Bismarck* neither stopped nor sent out boats. That was not the case; but it was curious that in a starlight night, and with smooth water, the boats should not have seen him—perhaps some current hurried him away. He was

not alone either; for presently there came floating past him, on an empty sheep-pen—a thing like a crockery crate whose bottom has fallen out—another human salvage. A crockery crate, as any one may imagine, is not a comfortable craft for even the shortest voyage in the fairest weather. It travels without any regard to keel. It is useless to label it "this side up": equilibrium is unstable. If it floats, it makes no pretence to support any one in an easy position; if it saves a passenger from drowning, it is careless about ducking him. On this coop was clinging a figure, with long arms, convulsively clutching the ribs of what had been a pen. Now and then it turned over, and the occupant would be seen, after a few moments of immersion, clinging on the other side.

Fred hailed him, and then paddled his raft of four oars towards this other shipwrecked mariner.

"Come," he said, cheerfully, "let us lash your boat to mine, and make room for two."

The occupant of the coop was apparently too exhausted to reply. Fred got him alongside, and managed to pass one of the oars through

the open bars. This gave an additional buoyant power to his raft.

"Now, then," he said, "you may take your fingers off the bars, and see if the oars will not keep us both up."

It was too dark to see the other man's face, but Fred made out that he was old; for he had very long hair, which shone in the glistening starlight like silver; with a heavy, long white moustache. On his back there hung a bag.

The man, without saying a word, shifted his hands from the bars of the coop, and threw his body athwart the oars. The feeble raft was not calculated to keep up the whole weight of his body, and went under.

"Hold up!" Fred cried. "Don't hang on to it that way, man. Rest your arm over it—hang it! we can't sit upon the thing."

"I was first," said the new-comer, uttering the most barefaced falsehood. "I was first, and the oars belong to me. You must go and find more oars for yourself. It won't bear both. Be off, I say."

Fred looked round upon the tranquil waters.

There were no more oars, nor any trace of the ship floating about.

"That's pretty cool," he replied. "But I suppose you are frightened—don't know what you are saying. However, we are too heavy. What have you got round your neck? It's heavy. If it's nothing to eat, throw it off."

"I won't throw it off," said his companion. "It is the work of my life. My Memoirs."

"Damn your memoirs!" cried Fred, in a great rage. He had got his knife in his right hand, the left holding on to the raft, and his body floating pretty easily. "Damn your memoirs! Do you think I am going to be drowned to save your mouldy Memoirs?"

With a dexterous movement he cut the string of the bag, dragged it from the man's shoulders, and let it drop into the water.

As they drifted, the bag went with them for a little, gradually dropping astern, and finally disappearing.

The man cried aloud, and made a feeble dash at Fred, as if he would cast him off the raft.

"No, you don't," said the younger passenger,

coolly. "Try it on again, my friend, and off you go, if you were Jonah himself."

"Don't blaspheme," the other said, in a hollow voice. "There's only an oar between you and death."

"Four oars and a sheep-pen," said Fred. "Look—there is a light on land. How far can a light be seen? Three—four miles. We are only so far from the shore. Pluck up, old boy; you will live to write your Memoirs all over again yet."

"No," he said. "No—no. I shall not live. It is the curse of that woman. Carry cursed me solemnly, and the boy cursed me. I shall die. I shall be cut off in my prime. I am unprepared—oh, dear! quite—quite unprepared; and too young—much too young to die."

"He's wandering," thought Fred.

"It's different for you," he went on, in a wandering way—choking now and then, when a wavelet dashed in his face. "You are only a steerage passenger. You have no money. There is nothing to keep you to this world; and very likely you will be better off when you get to the other. I can't. I am happy as I am. Oh,

dear! oh, dear!—if I was only safe back in Lowland-street. Why did I ever leave the room where I had lived happily for fourteen years?"

"Lord!" said Fred. "Are you the Hermit? I know you now."

"I was—I was. Everybody knows the Hermit of Lowland-street. I wish I was back there again. Ugh! I believe the wind is blowing up. Young man, there is not—there really is not room on these oars for two of us. I am the elder, and I was on the oars first. Take one or two bars from the pen, and go your own way. I rescued you from the sheep-pen, as you know. I dare say I shan't miss one or two sticks; but you must not take many. I saved your life, but not to be a means of destroying mine."

"That's a staggerer," said Fred. "Mr. Hermit, whatever you are, you are a coward. Don't cry and snivel, man. If we are to die, let us die like gentlemen."

"Oh, I never could think of dying. It's constitutional. I'm the bravest man in the world, except when it comes to dying. But this is

worse that the Crimea—worse than the trenches. A man had a chance there—what chance has he here?"

A wave broke over his face; and in his terror he shrieked, and nearly fell off the slender support that kept them up.

"Come, old boy," said Fred, cheerily. "It's cold and dark—it isn't pleasant for either of us. Can't you pretend, just for honour's sake, not to be a coward?"

"Three miles from land—only three miles—and to float about here, getting colder and colder, until we die! Young man, if you will swim ashore—you are strong, and swim well; I can spare you one of the oars; only three miles—and fetch out a boat for me, I will give you—whatever I can. I am Captain Lillingworth. I have served her Majesty. I am rich. Only help me to get ashore."

"If you are a soldier, you ought to face death without crying like a girl over it," said Fred. "I do not know which way the current is carrying us; but we must hope. It is about midnight now. When the day breaks, we shall see if there is any hope."

For three hours Captain Lillingworth moaned and cried, lamented and prayed. At intervals Fred remonstrated with him. It was useless. The man had but one feeling—that he might be drowned. He was a sensualist, and a coward. He clung to life. He was religious, too, in the same sense that the fallen angels are religious—because he trembled when his thoughts wandered in the direction of his creed.

The night sped on. Fred clung silently to the oars, and watched the east. His limbs were numb with cold, his fingers stiff. He began to wonder how long he could continue to hold on. He ceased to take any further notice of his companion, who went on moaning and crying uninterruptedly.

When they were lifted into the boat that saved them, the sun was high. They were only a mile from the shore when they were picked up. One of the boatmen had a little water, which revived them. The elder of the two cried and sobbed, lying in a heap at the bottom of the boat. The younger, trying to warm his

stiffened limbs, took an oar, and helped to row the boat ashore.

They brought the first news of the disaster. A sort of *levée* was held in the evening, at the little inn of the fishing town where they were landed. Captain Lillingworth had the only private room; and received—after dining as well as the resources of the place would admit—the special correspondents, the Coastguard officer, the parson, and the doctor. He was quite recovered. Dressed in a rough boatman's costume, lent him for the occasion, he sat in the only arm-chair, and smoked affably, drinking brandy and water, while the people plied him with questions.

In the kitchen, which was also the common smoking-room, sat the other passenger—the steerage passenger. He wore his own clothes, a good deal spoiled by the night's adventures. The sailors and fishermen sat round him while he told the story, so far as he knew. He did not think it necessary to inform his auditors of the unbecoming way in which his companion passed the night. Captain Lillingworth, for his part, was improving the occasion. He told how,

on the first intimation of the danger, he had rushed from his cabin, seized the helm, and dashed it hard a-port.

"She swung round, sir, with a will—the gallant craft! The steersman, as honest an old salt as ever chewed an inch of pigtail, seemed bewildered. But it was too late—too late!"

Here he paused, and wiped away a tear.

"Bah! I am a soldier. Let us face death manfully — eh, gentlemen? We can but die once. Happy he—you know, all of you—*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.* That means, I take it, to die in the discharge of duty. Then came the crash. I cannot bear to think of it. There were three or four women on board. I seized a child in one hand and a woman in the other. I saw, just at the last, the captain standing near to the boat on the bridge. The engineers came running up the gangway. I endeavoured, in the few moments which remained, to effect a little organization; but too late!—the boats were entangled. Well, there was the end of it. Nothing could have been finer than the behaviour of the officers. I hope some of them will prove to have been saved, and will bear me

out. The ship struck, gentlemen. I held the child and the lady; but when I came to myself I was floating on the surface with my hands upon a spar, and I saw no one else. Stay, there was the young man below stairs—not a sailor, poor fellow—and his wits were well-nigh gone. I rescued him, at least—that is some comfort—and did my best to cheer him up all night."

There were many more details; in fact, the graphic account called "The Foundering of the *Triton*," done into the most picturesque English in the daily papers, which made so great a sensation at the time, was mainly due to details supplied by Captain Lillingworth. How he battled with the terrors of the night; how he nearly perished in the attempt to save a whole shipful of passengers and men; how he triumphantly brought ashore one out of all; how he made the deck of the sinking ship a field for the display of the most heroic courage and coolness—all this was fully set forth.

"This gallant officer," said the special, "does not talk of his exploits; they are forced from him by questions and cross-examination. Like

all brave men, he is modest as regards his own achievements. We have yet to learn what other details will be supplied by those whom the *Bismarck* picked up. The young gentleman, Mr. Revel, whose life Captain Lillingworth was instrumental, under Providence, in saving, can remember very little of the disaster. We believe that Captain Lillingworth is already known as no carpet knight. He served in the Crimea."

The young man, indeed, was of no use to the reporters at all. When he read Captain Lillingworth's account he only laughed; and the half-dozen whom the *Bismarck* picked up were unable to confirm or contradict it. There were one or two who were struck by the name, and showed it to each other.

"Arthur Cleveland Lillingworth," said Colonel Firebrace to General Pyrgopolinices — "that's the fellow's name. Same man, of course."

"I remember him—bad business; hushed up, though. No one knew outside the regiment, except the chief. Let me read the story again. Lies, Firebrace, lies. You see his gallantry rests upon nobody's word but his own. He never did anything except lie. Here is a curious coinci-

dence, Firebrace. The fellow saved with him was named Revel. Wonder if it is any relative to the man whose wife he ran away with. Gad! the fellow was always ready enough to run away. Old story now—husband in the navy, excellent good officer; wife pretty woman and a fool—Carry Revel, they called her. It was a year or so before the Crimean row. Some of the fellows wanted the colonel to take it up. Wish he'd gone to the bottom, Firebrace. Upon my soul, I wish he was at the bottom with the rest!"

The gold medal of the Royal Humane Society was presented the next year, by common consent of the council, to the brave and gallant officer who distinguished himself at the loss of the *Triton*, Captain Arthur Cleveland Lillingworth, formerly of the Royal 125th Regiment of Light Infantry, the Swashbucklers, or Isle of Wight Fusiliers. He was living in retirement in a small town on the Garonne in France. On the receipt of the intelligence, the Prefect gave an official banquet to do honour to their illustrious ally, his old brother-in-arms, and in memory of the *entente cordiale.*

Fred, of course, got no medal; and as he seldom read the papers, he heard nothing about it. Therefore he was saved from the emotions of envy, malice, or derision. He went straight back to Lowland-street, arriving there just as the news of the disaster, with the names of the survivors, reached the place. Marion and Adie had not begun to weep for him as a brand snatched from the burning. Winifred was still at the telegraph office; but the schoolmaster was sitting at the window reading the graphic account with mingled feelings.

"I sent him away," he said. "If he had been drowned, how could I ever have looked my girl in the face again?"

And then he saw him hastening along the street, and went out to be the first to welcome him.

"I know now," he said, his wrinkled old face lighting up with welcome. "I know now. Winifred told me all. And so you escaped, and swam ashore, like St. Paul at Malta, did you? Come in and see them all. I think they have not so much as heard that you were in danger."

"I am come back, like a bad half-crown," said

Fred. "But I have not come back to loaf about again, Mr. Owen, you may be sure. Where is Winifred?"

And there was great rejoicing among the three loving hearts who welcomed back again this resolute pioneer of industry.

CHAPTER XV.

MARION sat in a sort of stupor when Joseph Chacomb left her at last, repeating the glad tidings to herself. Gerald home again! Her thoughts flew back to the day when they sat together on the cliff, and looked out upon the blue sea, flecked with the passing clouds. The wind fanned her cheeks again as they flushed once more at Gerald's burning words. His hand held hers close, close; again her heart leaped up with the unspeakable joy of a woman who loves her lover. All the present vanished. The twilight wrapped the mean lodgings of Lowland-street in obscurity, so that the room looked like the drawing-room of Comb Leigh. The cries of the children and footsteps of the passers-by fell on her ear unheeded, or resolved themselves into

the dashing of the waves upon the mouth of the cove, and the long-drawn moan of the shingle as the waters rolled them up and down. Then the beating of her heart grew too violent, and she cast her thoughts back five years before, when she was yet a girl trembling on the brink of womanhood. Then she roamed with Gerald about the hillsides, clothed with lofty bracken; or the woods inland, where wild birds answered their call, and Gerald hunted strange creatures, unknown except to those versed in woodcraft. There together they wandered from morning to eve. And when they came home at sunset, there was the kindly face to meet them at the gate, with the voices and laughter of the children.

Far away, that vanished life, yet present still. And always her thoughts turned again to the evening when Gerald kissed his last good night upon her lips, her cheek, her forehead, and her hands, when he drew her trembling to his arms, and kissed her all over again. Then came the next day—the day that broke deceitfully with radiant vest, ending in clouds and the blackness of a deep sorrow.

"Marion, are you asleep? Marion, dear, you are sitting all alone in the dark. Are you ill? Is there anything the matter?"

She roused herself, and came back to London. The room was shabby and mean; but the glamour of the trance was on her, and she was still in Devonshire.

"Is it you, Adie?" she answered. "Is it you? Come here, my darling, and let us talk. Do not light the candles."

Adie sat on the footstool at her sister's feet—the old attitude of love and trust—while Marion petted and caressed her face.

"Winifred is better to-night," said Adie. "She has been telling me all about it, and we have had a great cry. My dear, poor Fred has been living in an atmosphere of delusion. He thought he was going to get a good place somewhere through the interest of his old college friends. He promised Winifred to give her a great house and make her a fine lady. Poor Winifred! We will not desert her, Marion, will we?"

"No—poor Winifred! We will not desert Fred's wife, Adie. We have not been very happy for the last four years, have we?"

"Not your fault, Marion. Oh! not your fault, my best of Marions," she replied. "And you have forgiven me my impatience and bad tempers, have you not? Not your fault, my dear. You have worked for all, and we have been so helpless—oh! so helpless and exacting. Now Fred is gone, and there is only one left for you."

"Yes, dear, and I wish Fred was back again. Adie, I have had good news."

"Good, Marion?"

"Yes; so good—so good that I can hardly believe it true. My picture is accepted. Dr. Chacomb's friend writes everything that is kind of it. He says that it will sell, and that I shall do well yet. Are you pleased, dear?"

"Pleased? Oh, Marion! And we can leave this place." She sprang to her feet, because she could no longer keep still. "We shall actually leave this dreadful place at last—where we have suffered so much sorrow? Oh! Marion, can it really be that we shall live properly again?"

"I hope so, Adie—indeed, I think so. And—and there is another piece of news; but I will tell you that to-morrow evening."

"She is engaged to the doctor," thought Adie. "Is that good too, Marion?"

"Ah, yes!" she replied—"very good. Adie, do not ask me any more about it."

"Tell me more, dear, about the picture. Do let us talk about the future."

She sat down again. In the darkness you could not see the difference between the two faces. Marion's eyes were full of tears, and her lips trembled with the great and overwhelming joy of her soul. Adie, thinking of the new life that seemed to lie almost within her reach, talked with eyes aflame, and glowing cheeks. She looked like her brother on that night when he built his castles in the air in Lincoln's Inn-fields, and beguiled the heart of pretty Winifred.

"Marion, where shall we live? You do not want to be in London; we will go back to Devonshire. Not to Comb Leigh—not there, Marion; it would be too sad—but to some quiet place by the sea-shore, where we shall find a cottage just large enough for you, and me, and Winifred. We will have a garden with roses, like the roses of Comb Leigh. You shall paint the rocks and boats. We will have a village

girl to wait on us. We will sit in the shade, and talk about these dingy old rooms, and all we have done and suffered. And think of being ladies again, among ladies—if there are any in our Devonshire village! Think of a country church, and the sweet air! Oh, Marion, it seems too much that the old time should come back again to us."

"My dear, the old time is gone. The past never comes back again. But we may have happiness again. Sing me something, Adie—sing me a hymn."

She sang one of the newest. Most new hymns are irritating beyond expression with their pretence and their shallowness; but this was not. Adie sang it because the air pleased her; but the words fell upon her sister's ear like rain upon a thirsty soil.

As she sang, Marion sat with clasped hands, thinking. And to her crept, in the gloom, her new sister, Winifred. She stole up the stairs, listening to the hymn. She hesitated, because she was uncertain; it might be that Marion would not want her. But love, which casteth

out fear, prevailed; and she timidly came into the open door, and laid her hand upon Marion's.

Her new charge! Surely the world was full of love to her. Marion was so happy, that what Winifred meant as a mute appeal for protection and forgiveness, she took for sympathy with herself.

"My sister Winifred," she whispered.

All night she lay awake, till the red morning glowed through the windows; and then she fell asleep, praising God in her dreams.

The doctor came next day, in the afternoon, and took Adie out with him.

"You have not told your sister?" he whispered to her. "Gerald will call on you as soon as he comes to town, between five and six. Ah, Marion, be brave."

He repeated what he had said the day before, and the words fell upon her heart like frost upon the flowers of May. "Be brave." But why? What was there to be brave about? The doctor bade her be brave when her father opened his eyes to speak his last broken words of prayer and blessing.

"Be brave!"

She put the words by; they did not belong to her. They might have been spoken years ago, when all this trouble was coming on them; but not now—surely not now. The cause which parted her lover and herself was removed. It was but a ghastly dream, that hallucination of poor Mr. Chacomb's. The love that had never died would revive and flourish as if there had never been any interruption. She would see once more the light of passion, joy, and hope in the eyes of the man she loved; she would have again his arm about her. Pity poor Marion. She was only a woman, with all a woman's desire for the love of one man. She had never learned to unsex herself. She obeyed the instincts of her nature in thinking the wedded life the happiest and holiest lot. She did not hope for anything but the common lot of humanity. She lived in the dream which all good women feel, of universal love and sympathy. A most commonplace woman. Not a heroine at all; not even strong-minded; not even given to religious doubts. A woman born to be a wife and a mother.

Four o'clock. She made and took some tea, to quiet her nerves.

Half-past four. He would come in an hour.

She put her room in order, making it look as pretty as she could. She dressed herself—not that she had any choice of dresses—with an anxiety she had never felt before. She looked in the glass. The Spenser woman told her the truth when she said that her figure was gone, and her beauty faded. She saw a pale, thin cheek, with lines of care and suffering. She saw a wasted form. She saw eyes that seemed to have lost the capacity of happiness. What she did not see, and nobody saw but the doctor and poor Dicky Carew, was the steady light of steadfast love that burned there, and the seal of goodness on her forehead, set there by seven and twenty years of patient duty.

The afternoon seemed strangely silent. She missed the step of Mr. Lilliecrip overhead—the Hermit disappeared on the day when Mrs. Spenser had her revenge. Men came and removed his things, and the rooms were empty. She missed the anxious expectancy which was associated in her mind with her brother. The

boys in school, downstairs, made a soft murmur over their lessons, through the closed doors: it sounded like the buzz of many bees. When the master's voice was raised in reproof, it was as if a thrush chirruped; and when he caned a criminal, it was like a peacock screaming. The very street, for some reason of its own, seemed hushed and quiet. Her nerves were strung beyond the point of being touched by ordinary things, and she did not notice them. She tried to do some work, but her fingers would not hold a pencil. She tried to read, but it was just as when, four years before, the poet Pope took credit to himself because a nymph was reading the Essay on Man, inasmuch as the words floated before her brain, and she saw them not. And then she tried to play, and soothed her soul with some of the old things which never tire.

At five o'clock, the boys streamed out of the house, and began to play in the street—their only playing field—with a chorus of shouts. Leap-frog and fly-the-garter were "in," games which require, to bring out their full flavour, as much shouting as a Homeric battle. Marion did not hear them. She wandered about the

room restless. But the boys screamed so loud that Marion did not hear a cab drive up to the door. But she heard his step upon the stair. Was it likely that she should forget his step?

He came in—her Gerald!

As his eyes met hers, as his outstretched hand advanced to take her own, the words of Dr. Chacomb recurred to her with a force that drew the blood from her cheeks, and made her pulse stand still—

"Be brave, my girl!"

She was brave. She resolutely pushed away from her this pressure at her heart, which seemed to stop its beating. She took the offered hand, which had lost the remembered touch. She met the calm eyes, which looked as if they had never been stirred by the magic of love. She greeted him, as if no words of love had ever passed between them, with the warmth of an old friendship.

As for love, there was no more any thought of love. His face told her so much. It was set with a warmth which was different from the warmth of love.

"Marion," he said, taking her hand and holding it.

Did no thought of the past flash across his mind?

"Gerald," she replied.

Had they been lovers still, they could have said no more. As they were friends, they could say no less.

She saw that he was older, firmer of step and of face. She saw that his eyes had changed to her, and were now cold and hard. His lips had lost their smile. His very head, which used to bend as if with pleasure when he met her, was stiff and rigid. She had left a lover; she met a friend.

It came upon her with a suddenness which stunned her. She turned pale. Her face resumed its worn and wasted look. The ring of black colour returned to her eyes. Her happiness died swiftly out of her look.

Gerald saw a thin and prematurely aged woman—she was but seven and twenty; and—alas! for the quickness of poor Marion's perception, which showed her, at first sight, that love was dead, and so killed the beauty with which she

was prepared to meet him—he saw a wasted figure, a shaking hand, eyes that were dimmed with tears which even that brave heart could not wholly keep down, and—woe is me that I must write it!—the first love-making seemed to him like some impossible dream, which he had forgotten so long that it was a pity to begin it again. And what he saw, Marion read in his eyes.

This was their meeting. This was the end of her fidelity. He cared no more to re-open the closed chapter. It was for her to close it too with what speed and security she might.

She flushed a moment, thinking of Joseph Chacomb. Then her pride came to her help, and she greeted him with a smile—a thin, worn smile, like a gleam of sunshine in December.

"Tell me about yourself, Marion," he said, kindly.

"First, tell me what you have been doing."

He talked, she listened; and the effort of listening and trying to understand, and the tumult of bitter emotion, hardened her nerves. He told her how he had been wandering on the

uplands of Southern Africa; how his resolution at first was never to come back at all; how he had lived among the friendly savages, or among the simple Boers, uncorrupted then by diamond fields; careless of civilization, with England like a far-off dream, and only the memory of that last dreadful interview with his father to trouble him; how, little by little, the thirst for talk with his own kind drove him back to Cape Town, and so home again. A simple story of a simple journey, with no adventures to speak of, no sufferings and privations, no hopes and no fears.

"I have discovered nothing," he finished, "or next to nothing. I have returned as I went—empty-handed. Never mind, now. Tell me about you and yours, Marion."

"My story is simple. I have been painting, to keep the house together."

"And you have succeeded?"

Involuntarily he cast a glance at the shabby room, the furniture of which—the old furniture from Comb Leigh—fitted with the street and the house.

"I did not succeed—not very well, that is;

but I think, I hope, that I may succeed now. For I have a picture accepted at the Royal Academy."

Gerald did not seem much moved by the announcement. Colonial folk, as you may have observed, are provoking that way. They will not observe the nice gradations of success. If you tell an old Colonial friend that you have been discovered to rank with Tennyson or Browning, he is no more moved than if you told him that you have been compared with Tupper. To Gerald it seemed only proper that Marion's picture should be in the Academy.

"That's right," he said, cheerily. "And where are Fred and Adie?"

"Fred is gone. He tried hard to get something to do, poor boy; and, as he could not, he has emigrated."

"A very good thing too. England is a bad place for men who have been brought up to nothing. I am very glad I went abroad. And little Adie?"

"She is not little Adie at all now. She is taller than I am. If you will stay and have

some tea with me, you shall see her. She will be back again soon."

Gerald had not yet dined, but he stayed. Marion was glad that he did. She dreaded being left alone.

She made tea for him, Gerald helping in his old brotherly fashion; laughing, and telling her stories of his travels, in a pleasant, happy way which recalled the days even before he went to Brazil. Then he began to talk about Chacomb.

"My father is a good deal shaken," he said. "You will have heard about him from the doctor. The old hallucination, which gave us all such a shock once, is still strong upon him. And this miserable second marriage—but you know, probably."

"I know something," she said, wondering of what stuff men were made, that Gerald could talk so coolly of the great "shock," after all it had done to both. "I know something. Do not talk about it if it is painful to you."

"Not at all painful."

And then he began to take up the thread of his father's history from the funeral of Captain Revel, omitting all mention of the engagement.

Had the man no memory? Was it possible that he had actually forgotten?

Gerald had not forgotten. But the kiss which burned itself into the soul of the girl, and had become a part and parcel of herself, so that she felt it still upon her cheek like a brand, had long since gone out of his mind, or only lingered there as part of a pleasant day. There was an afternoon, and he kissed a pretty girl. Then came the evening, and he kissed her again. Then came a dreadful calamity, with the suspicion of worse disaster behind, and they parted.

Now they met again: he in the bloom and prime of early manhood, thirty years of age; she faded and worn, the shadow of her former self—the fruit that had withered on its stalk, the flower that had never bloomed to its fullest beauty. The kisses had been forgotten —Marion was a memory only. In the savage and wandering life that he had led, bodily fatigue drove out sad thoughts. The long marches and thirsty stretches, the fierce African sun, the hunting days, the camp life—all these had killed and crushed the lingering shoots of tender love.

And what was there to revive his passion? The *umbra* of what had been; the shadow of sweet maid Marion; the form without the light, and life, and laughter; the face without—ah! but he did not see her eyes—Marion's eyes—or else he would have loved again.

Eight o'clock struck, and they were still talking, when Adie came home, with the doctor.

"Adie," said Marion, "I told you I had some good news. Here is Gerald, come home again."

She had lit the candles by this time. Gerald rose to greet his old friend, who had been little schoolgirl Adie.

Heavens! Was this glorious creature, this queen of beauty, on whose brow sat all the graces, as the poets used to say; whose lips, and eyes, and dimpled cheeks were a multitudinous smile; whose hair was a coronal of glory—was this little Adie?

His eyes lit up as they had not done for her sister. Marion saw it, with a pang which struck her heart like a knife.

She beckoned the doctor to the window, and murmured, with dry lips—

"What was that you advised me, yesterday? Did you know?"

"I guessed. I did not know."

"I have been brave. Keep my secret, doctor —dear Dr. Chacomb, I trust my secret with you. Keep it, and be my friend, always."

"I will be whatever — good God! Marion, that it should be possible!—I will be whatever you let me be."

She touched his fingers with hers. It was a compact.

"We will always be as we are now, and always friends, dear Dr. Chacomb."

Then they joined the other two.

Presently the doctor, who had been very silent, went away, and they all began to talk of him—how good and great he was; how kind and unselfish. And because two were women, who believed what they wished to believe, and one was a stupid Colonial, who was inexperienced in the sin of great cities—the sin, namely, of selfishness, struggling to the front, trampling down those that are in your way, and appropriating to yourself the *kudos* that belongs to others—they all lauded, praised, and magnified

the name of Joseph the Good, who had stood by his poor cousin Chauncey, sacrificed his own time and interests to the good of Chacomb, and been more than kind to themselves, till admiration of his virtue took away their breath, and they were fain to stop and admire him in silence.

When Gerald took his leave, it was in Adie's face that he looked last, with an admiration which Marion, taught by experience, construed into passion.

"Marion, he is splendid! It is delightful—it is happiness. Oh, Marion," cried the younger girl, clasping her sister round the neck, "this *was* good news."

It was, indeed, good news. Such good news as some people try to persuade us is the good tidings of the gospel—good news of sorrow, misery, and impossible salvation.

"Go to bed, Adie, dear," said Marion. "I will come presently." She was longing to be quiet. She yearned for some place where she would be alone in her sorrow and bitterness. "Go, Adie," she added, in a voice harsh with impatience. "I will come—presently."

Adie left her at length; and Marion sat down, and tried to think.

Let us leave her to herself. There are some sorrows, besides those of bereavement, which are of a life, and cannot be told. Why paint the tortures of a man upon the rack? Why try to show how Marion battled with the agony that rent her, all the night, until gleams of peace came when, in the reddening east, God made a tender rose of dawn?

CHAPTER XVI.

GERALD remained in town. He resumed the old brotherly relations with Marion, talked about his projects and his experiences, asked her advice, and, like all the world, assumed her entire sympathy with him. He came daily, and took them both for walks and drives. Joseph Chacomb it was who secretly provided Adie with the means of procuring a "proper" dress or dresses for these excursions. Perhaps it was not only the pleasure of talking with Marion that brought him to Lowland-street.

Fred, who, after his dash into virtue and energy, felt the need of a little rest, resumed his loafing — except the billiards. The very thought of that prophetic marker filled his soul with horror. Gerald was good enough to lend

him a little money, with which he entertained himself in the daytime and his wife in the evening.

Then the Academy opened. Whether Joseph Chacomb was romancing when he offered to "square" the reviewers, I do not know. I incline to think that he was. I love to believe that there is as little envy, as little *camaraderie*, as little malice, as much appreciation, brotherly love, and kindness in Art as there is in Literature. Let me never cease to find cause for gratitude to critics, whether of pictures or of books. No doubt, Joseph Chacomb exaggerated his powers of influencing Art criticism. However this may be, the fact is certain that, when of the leaders some had been slashed and some had been stroked, all the papers with one accord turned to Marion's picture, and said good things about it. It was only by reading all the reviews and combining her information that Marion found out all the faults in her work. Then, indeed, she learned that it was sketchy, laboured, heavy in colour, pedantic, frivolous, weak in drawing, unreal in light, too real in the light, with so many other contradictions, that she was

fairly puzzled. And then the picture sold, and for a good price; and the great picture dealers, Messrs. Puffit, Pushem, and Co., men to whom Burls was humble, and before whom such creatures as Hermann Gottfried tried to efface themselves, took her up, and gave her commissions.

Marion saw her way at last. It was not the fame of immortality that awaited her, nor the fortune of a Turner; but it was comfort, ease, and a life of ladyhood that came within her reach.

She went a good deal to the Academy—partly to look at her own picture. Gerald sometimes went with her. They walked among the thousand gaudy frames where the Don Quixotes, the boats on the river, the "bits" of Haslemere, betray the poverty of artists' reading and resource, and where the unmeaning portraits of commonplace people stare from the walls; and always, to Marion's solace, a little crowd gathered round her own picture.

Every stroke in it was dear to her. She remembered the slow progress, the studies for the drawing, her hesitation about the colour, her desire to get things right, her anxiety about the

costume. The people saw nothing of all this; they looked at the sweet face—Adie's face—with its *insouciant* look, its parted lips, and the light of youth in the careless eyes: they saw the result.

"It is splendid, Marion," Gerald whispered. "I like it better every time I see it. We are proud of you."

Marion smiled. She was no longer unhappy—only a little sad and ashamed of herself; and she said to herself what the Emperor Alexander said to the Poles—

"Above all, no dreams."

"I should like to talk to you," said Gerald, quietly, "where there will be no one to interrupt us."

It was only ten in the morning, and the Academy was comparatively empty. He took her into the refreshment room, where there were two or three people taking breakfast.

"Marion," Gerald began, with great solemnity, and then stopped.

"Have you ordered, sir?" asked a waiter.

Gerald glared. Then he remembered, and ordered an ice; and then he tried to start afresh.

Marion's pulse did not quicken, nor did her cheeks flush. Whatever Gerald was going to say, there would be nothing to move her from her tranquillity.

"When I came home, Marion," he said—it was only a fortnight since that event, but he spoke as if it had been a year at least—"when I came home I intended to stay long enough to shake off the fever, and then to get back to Africa for another spell. Now, you would hardly believe it, I have changed my mind. I no longer care for African travel. It seems to me that nothing can be better than life in England. I am thirty years of age; my father is feeble; I ought not to expect my cousin to go on giving up his time to the care of Chacomb Hall. I shall stay at home."

"I am very glad indeed," said Marion.

"Yes—yes. We have always been brother and sister to each other, have we not?"

"Always brother and sister."

"There was a time when it seemed"—(only "seemed," Gerald?)—"as if we might be something more to each other. But it is better as it is."

"Better as it is," Marion murmured.

"I am not worthy of you. No one is, for that matter. If you only knew, Marion, how we all respect and love you! However, what I want to say is this. My father has never let the Rosery. Come back there. Forget the trouble that drove you from the place. You will be able to work there better than in London. You will be back in the old place that you love. And besides—"

"What besides, Gerald? Let me hear everything."

"I have not spoken to her yet. I would not speak to her without your permission. But—oh! Marion—will you let me be your brother indeed?"

Marion neither flushed nor turned pale. For a moment it seemed cruel to mock her; but she put the thought away.

"You mean Adie? Of course, you mean Adie. Gerald, she is dear to me. Examine your heart well. Four years ago—I am not reproaching you—you told another girl that you loved her. Now you love her no more. Remember, Gerald, I am not reproaching you. It

is better so, as we said before. But—you have ceased to love her. How do I know that you may not cease to love my poor Adie?"

Quietly as the words were said, they went home to Gerald.

"I can say nothing," he replied. "Marion, if the past could return—"

"It cannot. Let me only think that you love Adie steadfastly. Let us have no more mistakes. Life, Gerald, is not long enough for such blunders. They cannot be repaired."

"They cannot," he said. "You will believe me when I tell you that Adie's happiness is dearer to me than my own."

She laid her hand on his.

"I do believe you, brother Gerald."

And he never knew the effort by which she had enabled herself to say this honestly. He accepted the sacrifice, as everybody always accepted Marion's gifts, without asking what they cost.

"I wish you success, Gerald. And I will think over your proposal about the Rosery. I think we might afford to live there—Winifred, Fred, and I. It would be a great change for us, and

almost too great happiness. Let me think it over."

It was no longer unhappiness to feel that Gerald had never loved her, as she once thought —that she could never love him again. Perhaps she would have been higher than human had she witnessed without a pang the transference of his affections to her sister. But she hardened her heart against the thought, and preserved, to Gerald's eyes, the frank smile with which she always met him. Lower than human would he have been had he not remembered something of the troth which should have been sacred by the memory of the dead man who sanctioned it. He did remember it, and with shame. But the past, as Marion said, can never return; and he was dazzled by the loveliness of her sister. Venus Victrix laughs at the pale charms of Vesta. One needs to be a monk to rank St. Cecilia above Phryne.

Gerald had forgotten. It humiliated and pained him to be reminded, even in terms as gentle as those in which Marion clothed her plaint. This served him right. It was just that he should have a glimpse, even a momentary

and imperfect glimpse, of the ruin he had wrought. "Only a woman's hair," Swift wrote. Only a woman's heart, which Gerald Chacomb mocked and wounded. Had he known how deeply, there would have been small happiness for him in the after-years. But Marion smiled and passed on her way, no one but Joseph Chacomb knowing the truth.

She went back to the pictures, Gerald following with a sense of discontent and shame. Among the visitors was a fat man, with a large head, a flabby white face, and big white hands. He had a catalogue, on which he made notes with a big, square pencil. It was Mr. Hermann Gottfried. He took off his hat, and bowed politely.

"The pewtiful Miss Reffel," he said, loud enough for all the world to hear. "The sweet jung bainter. Ach! mein Gott!—what a bicture! what a bicture! You never painted zoch a bicture for me—neffer. But I forgif you. Ach! Herr Je—yes—I forgif you. Zo, Miss Reffel, I was wrong. You will not—no neffer—be one of my jung men. Eh? Ze jung men will make their gobies from you. Where is the most pew-

tiful of all young laties that effer was bainted! Where is the lofely zister?"

A week later, they were leaving the old lodgings. Once more the well-used furniture was to go back to Devonshire, and to the Rosery. Chauncey Chacomb, deprived of the society of his fond and loving wife, and awakened to the fact that his son was really restored to him, wrote a humble and contrite letter to Marion. He begged forgiveness for cruel words and for dreadful suspicions. He asked humbly to be allowed to see her again at Chacomb Hall. He expressed his joy at Gerald's engagement.

"Since," he wrote—"since I heard of it, a great thing has happened to me. I have ceased to see your poor father's face at night. So that I know now—what my cousin Joseph always told me—that it was hallucination. Perhaps I shall forget it, even the memory of it, in time; but I fear not. I have suffered greatly, Marion; and if you will all come back to your old cottage, it will help me to greater peace of mind. I beg your acceptance of the greatest treasure in all my Collection. It is no less an heirloom than

the identical dagger with which King Edward was stabbed. It was dug up at Corfe Castle by myself, and identified as of the period by the Council of the Swanage Archæological Institute. I give it to you as a pledge of my earnest desire to win back your friendship and forgiveness."

The treasure was very much like an old dinner knife, rusted by lying in damp ground. By holding it so as to catch the light sideways, Marion once thought she saw the name of "Rogers, Sheffield," upon it. But we know that to be an old firm, and very likely it supplied the Court of the Wessex King with cutlery.

"Marion," said Adie, "let us jump for joy. Let us sing. Let us dance. We are going back to Comb Leigh. Oh, if only we could find everything there just exactly as we left it. Winifred, we will dance upon the lawn. Think. The wistaria will be all out in great purple bunches, like lovely grapes; and the yellow jessamine—it is too late for that. There will be the lilacs, and the laburnum, and roses all ready to burst into flower, directly they see me again."

Then Mr. Owen crept into the room, looking

as unhappy as if he were about to lose his scholars.

"I shall have no heart left for anything," he said. "What shall I do when you are all three gone?"

"You will have no one to tease you," said Adie. "You will read Plutarch and the Book of Proverbs, and smoke your pipe all by yourself every evening. There is always compensation, you know. You have often told us so."

"Compensation! what can compensate for losing my daughter?"

"But you shall come and see us. Shall he not, Marion?" This was Winifred.

"Nothing can compensate," he said, mournfully. "It is like the cow's tail. You know that the cow's tail, Miss Marion, was made to brush off the flies. *But it is not long enough.* That's the compensation of things. When are you going to be married, Miss Adie? Ah! There's more trouble. Why can't girls—no, Winifred, my dear, I won't say it."

"I shall miss Adie," said Marion. "But I have got Winifred instead. And we are all proud of Fred now, are we not, Mr. Owen?"

"Ay," he replied. "He's made a man of himself."

These simple folk believed that Fred had retrieved his character, and fulfilled entirely the promise of his youth, by simply embarking on board the *Triton*, and swimming ashore. Providence clearly intended him to remain in England. Its finger—as the clergymen say when they change a lean living for a fat one—was visible to the naked eye, pointing in the direction of superior material comfort.

"Poor Fred!" said his wife. "It makes me so happy to think that he has won back everybody's good opinion. I always said he was the noblest of men."

He was indeed—as Gerald was the truest.

There was a knock at the door.

It was Dicky Carew. He was attired in an entirely new suit of black cloth, with a large expanse of white shirt front. In his left hand he bore a bunch of roses. His face presented a mixture of pride and shame. Behind him came the portly person of Mrs. Medlar.

"Miss Revel, he said, "we have taken the liberty—allow me to present to you my wife, Mrs.

Richard Carew, the late Mrs. Medlar—learning that you have at last taken the position your talents, as well as your birth and social qualities, entitle you to take—taken the liberty, I say, of calling to wish you, if we may, our most sincere congratulations and hearty hopes for the future, before saying farewell—"

He stopped, choked, laid the roses on the table, and added, in a broken voice—

"For ever."

"I've seen you, Miss Revel, every day a'most for three years and more," said Mrs. Carew, "and all Lowland-street knows you for the best of good women and the hardest worked. My husband is one of them that worship the ground you tread on—there's lots more—but we know our distance, and we keep it."

"Perhaps, Mr. Owen," said Mr. Carew, feebly—"perhaps you will bear me out in saying that I am not the only one in this respectable street who knows and values Miss Marion Revel."

"Indeed he can," cried Winifred, seizing Marion's hand.

"There's not one," said the schoolmaster—"I don't care where you look, high and low, in

ancient and in modern history—there are no women in Plutarch—you won't find a woman—I beg your pardon, Miss Marion, a lady—that can hold a candle to Miss Marion Revel. 'She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; she is like the merchants' ships—she bringeth good things from afar; her price is above rubies; strength and honour are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come. Let her own works praise her in the gates.' That's what the wise man said of the good woman; and he would have said it of Miss Marion Revel if he'd only known."

"And so he would," said Mrs. Medlar—we mean Mrs. Carew—"so he would. Miss Revel, we wish you the best of happiness, and—Richard, come away; don't you see you've made me cry? It's always the way with men—and their stupid compliments."

She nodded at Mr. Owen, as much as to say that his extracts from the Book of Proverbs were misplaced.

"No—no," said Marion. "But you are too good, all of you."

"The best woman in the world," said Richard.

"I told them down below in the street that you were all going, and there is a little crowd assembled to wish you good-bye. Mr. Owen here, who was going to cane Candy Secundus, has let him off."

"I hadn't the heart," said the schoolmaster. "It was wrong; but I was obliged to forgive him. A wise son heareth his father's instruction: Candy Secundus never hears any instruction. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

"Miss Revel," Dicky continued, "there are all the women you have helped crying because you go away and leave them; there are the poor girls who looked to you when they were starving and tempted. You cannot go without saying 'God bless you' to them—can you?

"There's myself, too," he went on. "I came because I couldn't help it, and Mrs. Carew because she wanted to show that she wasn't jealous."

"Quite right, Richard," said his wife; "and to show Miss Revel that it wasn't philandering with *her* that I was afraid of." She transfixed poor Winifred with a look which spoke volumes. "Go on, my Richard."

"Her Richard!" exclaimed Dicky. "Yes, Miss Revel. The dream is o'er, the vision faded. I have been lazy, and I am now rewarded. I have missed all my chances. I have lost the reputation I might have won.

'Like a door on its hinges, so he with his head,
Turned round and winked at her, and went back to bed.'

You remember the hymn, Mr. Owen? I have deserted the Muses, and am going in for business. The—ahem!—the late lamented Mr. Medlar, a man of great weight and consideration—"

"He was only five foot two in his stocking feet, and he weighed two hundred and twenty-five pounds," said his widow.

"— was a distinguished purveyor. He left behind him a connection—"

"In the pork and fancy pie line," said Mrs. Carew.

"Precisely." Dicky shuddered. "A connection which it would be a sin to allow quite to drop. So we are going to reopen the—the emporium—"

"The pork shop," said his wife.

"And—in fact—my energies will be hence-

forth devoted to the retailing of murdered swine. I believe that I shall not personally stick those interesting and toothsome animals. No other ignominy, however, will be spared. I have also taken the pledge."

"For a second time," said Mrs. Medlar. "And he means to keep it, this time, or I'll know the reason why."

Dicky shook his head, and groaned—

"She will know the reason why!"

Then Fred arrived with cabs to take the luggage, and experienced persons came to pack up the furniture; and presently they all drove away, leaving Lowland-street, with its joys and sorrows, behind them.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY story draws to an end, and is nearly told. All these things occurred in the spring of the year of grace 1870. In the summer of that year, as all the world knows, happened the overthrow of France, accompanied by such a cock-crowing on the part of the conquerors as may be expected when those who have been accustomed to defeat suddenly gain the victory. We have not forgotten, nor are any of us likely to forget, the honest rejoicing of the Fatherland. Socialism, junkerism, militarism, press-gagging, press-inspiring, absolutism, pedagogism, professorism, terrorism—all the other isms which make life in Prussia admirable, and Germany a land of sweetness and light—were forgotten in that great scream of rapture and astonishment which

still echoes in our ears. The country of *Geist*, with a wonder that it has not yet overcome, saw itself in dreams the leading power in the world, and a living proof of the Great Frederick's creed that the God of battles sides with the bigger army.

The roaring of the cannon beat upon the ears of one listener in a quiet little Devonshire village, rousing him from an indolence which seemed invincible to a wrath heroic. Day after day, as the tidings came to England of more disaster, Fred Revel bethought him more and more of the French blood in his veins. He could not sleep. He wandered up and down, with the news of each morning ringing in his brain. Day and night the force which drew him with invisible bonds grew stronger. He pored over the map; he reckoned the chances; he talked, dreamed, thought of nothing but the war. Marion watched him, suspicious; his wife watched him, suspecting nothing, but wondering at the passion which filled her husband's heart.

One night—it was after the crushing fight of Gravelotte, when the French might have won,

had they been a few thousands stronger, or had—but they lost, and it was enough—he spoke.

The papers came in the evening, and Fred read the letters in the *Daily News*—the paper which first showed the world what a war correspondent ought to be—with flushing cheek and excited eyes.

"Marion," he said one evening, "have you read to-day's news?"

She knew what was in his mind, and waited.

"We are of French descent, Marion."

"Yes, Fred."

"We have been soldiers and fighting men from generation to generation—all but myself."

"Yes, Fred."

"Marion, tell me what you think. Say what I ought to do."

She trembled. It was a heavy responsibility that her brother threw upon her—the responsibility of his life.

"Can you bear to leave Winifred?"

"I can bear anything. Tell me I ought to go."

She obeyed the voice within her. She arose, went to her own room, and returned with her father's sword.

"Keep it for me, Marion," he replied. "If I come back, I will claim it as my right. If I never return, give it to Winifred, for—for the unborn child."

It was eleven o'clock. He stepped gently into his wife's room—where she lay asleep, poor girl—and kissed her on the forehead; but so lightly that it did not awaken her. Then he made up a small bundle of necessaries, and came back to bid farewell to Marion.

"Better so," he said. "Break the news to her to-morrow. Tell her—no—let her think that I am not so worthless as I seem. And God bless her—and you, too, Marion!"

Exactly four years before, under such a summer moon, he had taken the same road to catch the night train to town. Four years! He thought, as he strode along the quiet lanes, beneath the tall hedges, on whose leaves the moonlight lay in silver, of all that had happened since then. The misspent years might have followed his footsteps, accusing. But Fred's

conscience was not so sensitive. He only thought that the time had been wasted. He only remembered that on one or two occasions —such as that bill of sale business—he had been imprudent. He did not repent of the past, because it never occurred to him that, with a few trifling exceptions, there was anything to repent about. But for the future he had no fear. He was going to be a soldier. He ought to have been a soldier from the first, like his fathers before him.

He joined Chanzy, and before many weeks gained his colours. It was the life for which he was best fitted. In the movement and continual change of the camp, spite of the disasters that crushed his cause, he was far happier than he had been, wasting his sister's substance in riotous living. His letters home were full of hope and enthusiasm; and the hearts at Comb Leigh were kept at ease through the infection of his good spirits.

Suddenly the letters ceased; and Gerald managed to find out that the Lieutenant Count de Reville—Fred, needless to say, enlisted under his French name—was among the miss-

ing after one of the battles, which were mostly skirmishes before Orleans.

Marion went herself in search of him. She sent Winifred to Chacomb Hall, in charge of Adie, comforted her with hope, and started alone to look for her brother.

Over the battle-fields and in the camps she sought. She made her way among the Frenchmen, mad with defeat and shame; among the jubilant Germans, anxious only now to have an end of it, and fight no more for the madness of an Empire tottering to her fall; where the ambulance corps performed their duties under the protection of the much-abused Geneva Cross. She searched for Fred as Evangeline searched for Gabriel, but with a better result.

For she found him.

To be sure, she had not to wander over the whole of America; and the battle-fields of the Midi did not cover a greater extent of ground than the county of Yorkshire. She found him at last, lying in a farmhouse, stricken grievously, but not unto death. Outside, the grapes hung in ripe clusters, the corn was reaped,

the autumn flowers blossomed, and the convolvulus clambered about wall and porch. Nature, in that unfeeling way of hers which I have already noted, took no notice of the war, and went on with her flowers, as if there were no weeping women and heart-broken men. In the shade was a soldier, a German, smoking a placid pipe, and thinking very likely of Gretchen. Why we always associate a German soldier with Gretchen, I do not know. When he clearly understood that the gracious lady was not intent on slaughter, he informed her that they had wounded men in the place—French and German. Might she see them? The gracious lady might see the door open: there was nothing to prevent her walking in.

Within the place lay, in half a dozen rooms, pallets filled with the wounded. Some—but no, it is too near the end of the tale. Among them, in one of the smaller rooms, lay her brother Fred.

His right arm was gone—that was immediately apparent. His forehead was tied up with a cloth, for it was laid bare to the bone—perhaps a piece of shell, or a spent shot. He

had an open wound in the leg, and he was raving with fever.

Marion obtained permission to stay there. There were no nurses in this farmhouse used for a hospital, only a young army surgeon—a dreamy, expert German, who talked a brutal materialism and acted the highest Christianity. Him Marion conquered. She was a very Venus Victrix for reducing every man to a state of abject reverence and admiration; and in a day she was mistress of the hospital, and nurse-in-chief to all the poor fellows on the pallets, from Jacques Bontemps, the Auvergne peasant, to Max Herbst, from Posen. All knew that she was come after her brother; but every man felt that, next to him, he was himself the chief object of her solicitude.

In November, when the yellow leaves of Chacomb Park were heavy with autumnal dews, and the air faint with the odour of crushed and decaying leaves, Marion brought her brother home to his wife.

He was scarred. He had only one arm, and that the left. He was pale and wasted. But he was home again; and he was a hero.

Marion brought him once more his father's sword, and laid it in his left hand.

"Take it, my brother. It is yours."

"Yes, Marion," he said, humbly. "I may claim it now, may I not?"

Winifred buckled it on for him, smiling through her glad and happy tears.

Fred was a hero. As long as he lives he will enjoy the honour and respect which men in all ages have agreed to pay to him who acquits himself manfully in the battles of his country. No other honour is equal to this. The poet's crown and statesman's statue are poor things compared with the praise and envy bestowed on a gallant fighting man. It is better to be Turenne than Colbert. Wellington seems a greater man than Pitt. Murat in his lifetime was a more gallant figure than Talleyrand.

Fred, for all the countryside, was a hero. The women remembered how he stood, brave and handsome, at his father's funeral, the prop and support of his house. No doubt he had propped it and supported it during the four years of exile from Devonshire. What but good was to be expected of one so handsome?

A hero! And yet it does not seem that his moral nature was altered. He had been as lazy as Lawrence, and he continued in his laziness—of course, a man with only the left arm could not be expected to work. He is just exactly what he always has been—as indolent, as good-natured, taking as keen a delight in merely breathing the air of heaven, as affectionate, as avid of pleasure. Only his pleasures now cost nothing. He can fish with his left arm. He can sail with Gerald. He can go to Exeter with his brother-in-law for such dissipation as that city affords. He cannot, happily, play billiards. He can ride; he can play with his children; and he can be the joy and happiness of his wife and sister. Always a favourite with everybody. Great is amiability, and it shall prevail.

Selfish!

When Mr. Rhyl Owen comes down once a year to see his daughter, he allows himself to be overcome with shame at the folly of his former predictions.

"That man worthless, Winifred? Why, you ought never to forgive me. A fool talks folly. What says Solomon? 'Whoso keepeth his

mouth and tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.' And again: 'He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour; but a man of understanding holdeth his peace.'"

And yet, most certainly, had this young man remained in London, his end would have been like unto that of the prophetic billiard-marker.

And so the end of action has come—the problem of what each shall do with his life is solved. There will be no more anxiety for Marion and the rest till the little ones grow up, and a new generation begins its own troubles.

At Comb Leigh there is peace, and but little intercourse with the outer world. The most frequent visitor is Dr. Chacomb. Quite recently he has achieved his highest ambition. He has not only become the acknowledged leader in his profession for gout, but he has received the honour of a baronetcy. He is now Sir Joseph Chacomb, Bart., M.D. This distinction was acquired in pulling a certain exalted personage through an attack which threatened to fly to the stomach. Dr. Chacomb, who was called in at an early stage, manifested the very greatest devotion throughout. He sat up for four nights,

without leaving the patient's bedside. He never left it at all, in fact, till the danger was over, and the great man safe. Then they knighted him. Of course, Dr. Porteous, of Savile-row, declared that there never had been the slightest danger; that the bulletins issued every two hours by his rival were quite unnecessary; and that all the racket was got up by himself, for his own ends. How hateful a passion is envy!

Sir Joseph has never renewed his suit to Marion. He knows, indeed, that it would be useless. But there is no one in the world in whose society he takes such pleasure, with whom he is less cynical, or more hopeful of his fellow-creatures. Like the wicked man, his eyes swell out with fatness; but Sir Joseph is a wicked man no longer. Observe that, like Fred, he has improved with prosperity. He owes not only his success, but also his present virtue, to the artful measures which I have had as historian to chronicle, and as moralist to deplore. All my people, indeed—except Marion, Adie, and Winifred—have been sinners; and nobody, somehow, except poor Mrs. Spenser, has been punished for his sins. My friends, it is only in copybooks

that people get punished in the material manner. There are some sins which even carry their own reward, in the shape of prosperity, with them. There are some, on the other hand, which carry their own punishment. These latter, young candidate for worldly success, find out and avoid. Fred, you see, who never would work, any more than the Idle Apprentice, is comfortable and happy, provided with the best of wives, and kept in affluence by the painting of his sister. Gerald, who broke every pledge of love and constancy, never felt any repentance, never knows how great and glorious a woman he threw away, never institutes comparisons between the present and the possible past, and is perfectly happy with a wife of whom he is beyond measure fond and proud. The doctor, who found a way to greatness by paths tortuous and questionable, is on a pinnacle of fame. Dicky Carew is really eminent in his new walk. And even the second Mrs. Chacomb has been rewarded for her bold stroke by a comfortable annuity.

Compensation? Yes. But, like the cow's tail, it does not reach far enough. These sinners will never repent; they will never be punished. All

that the moral philosopher can prophesy is that from time to time they may be reminded of the past, and feel a pang of remorse or shame, sharp in direct proportion to their present happiness.

Is Marion, the innocent scapegoat of all the sins and misfortunes of others, the only unhappy one?

No. Happiness—as people who have got everything they want are fond of telling us—does not depend always on obtaining what we vehemently desire. There is—only preachers very seldom know anything about it—a happiness independent of all human desires, which issues from the higher, unselfish life. In the years to come, Marion sees a long life of labour; but it is labour rewarded with some honour, and sufficient pay. She will not be a great artist, like Rosa Bonheur; but she will command a sale for her works. She will not be remembered for ever, like Raffaelle; but she will please the better taste of the day, and advance, by her purity, truth, and sweetness, the highest interests of Art. Her house will not be lonely, for Winifred and the children will light it up; with Fred

—the lazy, careless Fred, of whom his wife can never be too proud, or his sister too fond.

And all shall love her alike. As the children read of women to be worshipped, they shall think of Marion. When they grow up, and can understand something of the mystery and meaning of good works, they shall associate all good works with Marion. When they hear of those who give and spend for others, their thoughts will turn to Marion. She has—as Mr. Owen was fond of saying—she has the fruit of her own hands: her own works praise her in the gates. There is a CROWN for those who live for others, more glorious than any wreath of the Nemæan games. Hers is the golden HARP, with which to celebrate the victory over sorrow and disappointment—the solution of the problem, insoluble to the selfish world, the final triumph of Love over Pain.

THE END.